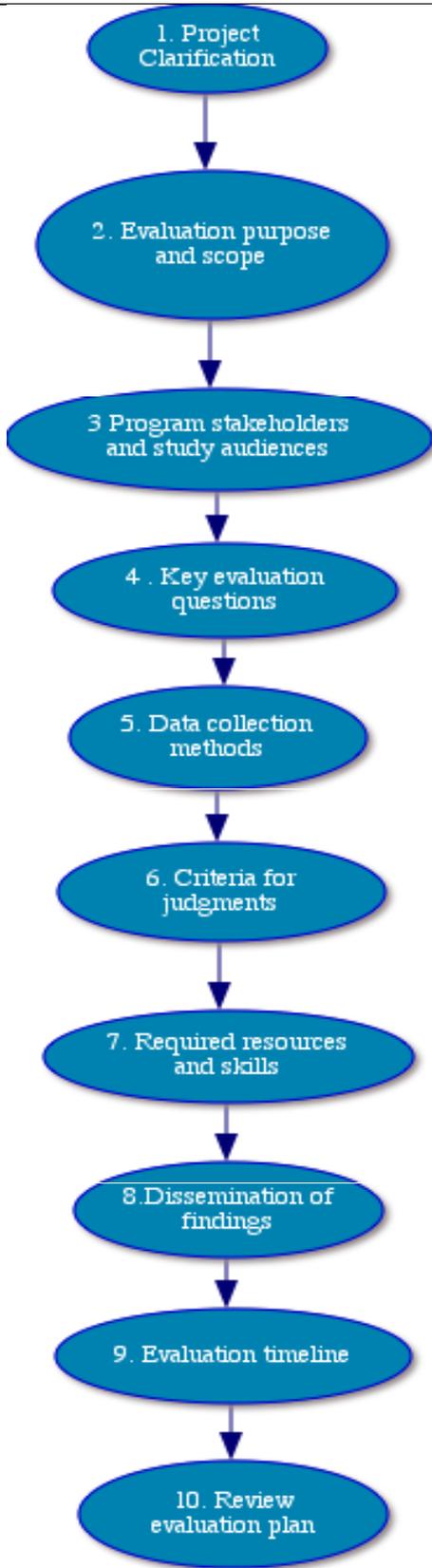


ALTC PROJECT EVALUATION RESOURCE



Purpose of the Resource

This resource is designed to provide guidance and assistance on project and program evaluation to individuals and groups submitting proposals for funding under the ALTC’s Grants and Fellowships Programs. Details of the Grants Scheme are available at: <http://www.altc.edu.au/grants-and-projects>; and Fellowships Scheme at: <http://www.altc.edu.au/fellowships>. The guidance is in the nature of background information on what project evaluation is and what constitutes good practice in the evaluation of learning and teaching projects. Assistance is provided in the form of templates for key elements of a project evaluation, links to a list of potential evaluators, and examples of evaluation reports. The resource also links to resources on project evaluation that help you and/or the evaluation team to carry out the evaluation — from design to data collection, analysis and management to reporting the findings. This resource is designed around the development of an evaluation plan, and it is intended that every project proposal will show evidence of formal evaluation planning that focuses on questions such as those outlined in this resource.

Depending on the expertise and experience of the user, the resource might be used for a variety of purposes, including as a guide for an evaluation plan, a checklist to assess a draft plan, a resource to inform stakeholders of good practice in evaluation, or to review a completed evaluation study and report.

Project Evaluation Defined

Evaluation is a generic process defined at its most general level as the “systematic investigation of the worth or merit of an object” (Program Evaluation Standards, 1994). It can be applied at the level of policy, program and project. At the project level, evaluation can be seen as the processes of:

- negotiating an evaluation plan with stakeholders;
- identifying, collecting and analysing evidence to produce findings; and
- disseminating the findings to identified audiences for use in:
 - describing or understanding the project and/or
 - making judgements and/or decisions related to the project.

adapted from Owen, 2006

Evaluation is the key for project improvement as well as assessing worth or merit, but evaluation must be carefully planned for it to be useful. The nature of learning and teaching projects varies considerably which means that no one evaluation methodology or one suite of techniques will ‘fit’ all projects. It is necessary to match the evaluation approach with the particular project. In addition, the purpose and focus for an evaluation will vary depending on the needs of stakeholders who may include funding agencies, project developers, teaching staff and students. The needs of stakeholders influence the issues to be explored in the evaluation, which in turn influence the evaluation design and methodologies to be used. Finally, projects vary over time and different issues are important at different stages in a project so the focus for evaluation will change. It is therefore important to involve the evaluator as early as possible in the project.

Useful References

Useful Resources

SUMMARY OF KEY ELEMENTS IN EVALUATING ALTC GRANT PROJECTS AND FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

These two pages provide an overview of the key elements to be considered when evaluating a project. The questions are a guide and might not apply to all projects.

	<p>1. <u>Project Clarification: What is the nature of the project?</u> What is the focus of the project? What is the scope of the project? What are the intended outcomes? What are the operational processes developed to achieve the outcomes? What is the conceptual and theoretical framework underpinning the project? What is the context of the project? What key values drive the project?</p>
	<p>2. <u>What is the purpose and scope of the evaluation?</u> Why is the evaluation being done? How will the information be used? What evaluation form(s) and approach(es) might be most suitable for this study? What is the role of the evaluator in this project?</p>
	<p>3. <u>Who are the stakeholders for the project and the audiences for the evaluation information?</u> Stakeholders- Who has an interest or stake in the project and/or its outcomes, and in the evaluation of the project? Audiences - Who will be interested in the results of the study and what types of information do they expect from the evaluation? How should competing interests be prioritised?</p>
	<p>4. <u>What are the key evaluation questions which the evaluation will address?</u> What processes were planned and what were actually put in place for the project? Were there any variations from the processes that were initially proposed, and if so, why? How might the project be improved? What were the observable short-term outcomes? To what extent have the intended outcomes been achieved? Were there any unintended outcomes? What factors helped and hindered in the achievement of the outcomes? What measures, if any, have been put in place to promote sustainability of the project's focus and outcomes? What lessons have been learned from this project and how might these be of assistance to other institutions?</p>

<p>5. Data collection methods</p>	<p>5. <u>How will the information be collected and analysed?</u> What/who are the data sources? What types of data are most appropriate? What are the most appropriate methods of data collection? How will the data be analysed and presented in order to address the key evaluation questions? What ethical issues are involved in the evaluation and how will they be addressed?</p>
<p>6. Criteria for judgments</p>	<p>6. <u>What are the criteria for making judgments about the findings of the evaluation?</u> Examples of criteria questions might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the intended student learning outcomes been achieved? • How well have the needs of staff been met? • How appropriate were the project activities in relation to staff capabilities and the institution's ICT structures?
<p>7. Required resources and skills</p>	<p>7. <u>What resources and skills are required to conduct the evaluation?</u> Who will conduct the evaluation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should the evaluation be undertaken by an individual or team? • Should the evaluation be undertaken by insiders or outsiders? <p>What are the key issues to consider in engaging an evaluator? At what stage(s) of the project should the evaluator become involved? What is the budget required for the evaluation activities?</p>
<p>8. Dissemination of findings</p>	<p>8. <u>How will the evaluation findings be disseminated?</u> Who are the audiences for reports on the evaluation and what are their particular needs and interests? What are the functions of reporting? What reporting strategies will be used? When will reporting take place? What kinds of information will be included in evaluation reports?</p>
<p>9. Evaluation timeline</p>	<p>9. <u>What is the timeline for the evaluation activities?</u> Given the resources and project plan, what will be achieved at key times/points during the evaluation?</p>
<p>10. Review evaluation plan</p>	<p>10. <u>Is the evaluation plan internally coherent and of high quality?</u></p>

1. What is the nature of the project?

Before any planning for an evaluation of a project can begin, it is essential that there be a clear and comprehensive mapping of the project itself. This should have been done in the grant or fellowship proposal, however a useful first step in planning an evaluation should be to clarify and confirm the project focus, processes and intended outcomes. Some key elements to address in this regard include:

Focus of the project - What is at the core of the project? What issue(s) is it fundamentally aiming to address?

Scope of the project - What are its boundaries? What will be included and what will be excluded? Over what time period will it operate? Which parts of the organization(s) will be involved? Which particular staff or students or other individuals or organisations will be included?

*Intended outcomes*¹ – What specifically is the project designed to achieve? This needs to be spelt out in detail, for example in terms of specific knowledge and skills to be gained by participants, or specific changes in the ways that staff or students operate. The outcomes need to be specified to the point of being measurable or at least to be identified in sufficient detail to enable an evaluator subsequently to determine the extent to which they have been achieved. It is important to distinguish between outcomes and outputs (see below).

*Operational processes*¹ – What activities and procedures will be developed as part of the project in order to achieve the intended outcomes? What is the basis for expecting that these particular activities and procedures will lead to the intended outcomes within the project's particular context?

Conceptual and theoretical framework – What are the key concepts underpinning the project and how are they linked to each other? What is the body of theory in which the project is located and how does it fit with that theory?

Context of the project – What are the key features of the institutional context in which the project will operate? In what ways will these help or hinder in conducting the project and in achieving its intended outcomes? Are there other contexts, such as the broader higher education context or individual participant contexts, that will also influence the project's operation and outcomes? If so, in what ways will these contexts help or hinder the achievement of the project outcomes?

Key values – What are the values that drive the project? To what extent are the project's intended processes and outcomes consistent with and reflective of these values?

¹ Outcomes and processes can be seen as two elements within the following framework.

- Inputs – the resources put into the project to enable it to occur, e.g. time and expertise, materials, facilities and equipment.
- Processes – the project's procedures and activities, e.g. workshop activities, planning sessions, individual and group tasks, analysis of data, project management.
- Outputs – products of the project, e.g. number of workshops conducted, number of staff trained, number of students achieving intended results.
- Outcomes – effects of the project on target groups, e.g. changes in knowledge and skill levels of staff or students, may be short-term or longer-term
- Impacts – cumulative effects of the project over time, e.g. fundamental changes in the ways that staff undertake a particular set of responsibilities, which are often not observable or directly measurable within the timeframe or influence of a single project.

2. What is the purpose and scope of the evaluation?

Why is the evaluation being done?

Once the project to be evaluated is clearly defined including its intended design, implementation, outputs and outcomes, it is essential to identify the purpose for which the evaluation is being carried out. The purpose is the primary reason for doing the evaluation. For example, the evaluation might be to provide information to project designers on how to improve their design, or intended to assess the extent to which the project achieved student learning outcomes. Each evaluation should have a primary purpose around which it can be designed and planned, although it may have several other purposes. It is a common problem in evaluation studies that they are expected to be all things to all people, whereas the reality is they have limited resources (time, funds, expertise) and thus can only focus on a limited range of purposes. Evaluation studies which are too much of a shotgun approach are unlikely to adequately address the needs of any stakeholders.

How will the information be used?

In defining the purpose of the study, it is helpful to identify how the information collected and reported by the study will actually be used and by whom. This is likely to narrow down the purpose of the study. For example, if it is decided that the project requires information about how well a project is being implemented so different groups can learn from each other (perhaps in several schools or institutions), it is essential that information is collected about implementation and disseminated to these groups in time to be of use in modifying the project implementation. This type of evaluation information is termed formative, whereas information collected to make judgements about the outputs, outcomes or impact of the project is termed summative.²

Role of the evaluator

The purpose of the evaluation will also help clarify the role that the evaluator will play. Is it to be a critical friend to the project team, involved in project meetings, asking searching questions to challenge thinking, monitoring the progress of the project, recording the processes of the project including decision-making and management, and providing regular formative feedback to the project team? Or is the role to be an independent collector and analyser of existing and new data, reporting on summative questions of project performance and outcomes? Or as is likely, is it to be some combination of these two? If so, what is the balance? How independent should the evaluator be in this particular context? Answers to these questions should be made explicit in an evaluation plan and will help clarify expectations and resolve problems that may arise.

² **Formative Evaluation** provides information for improvement by identifying aspects of the project that are successful and areas in need of improvement. The study generally focuses on the content and design of the project, with results useful to staff. **Summative Evaluation** provides an overall perspective of the project. The study usually focuses on the value or worth of the project and is designed for accountability or continuation purposes.

What evaluation form(s) and approach(es) might be most suitable for the evaluation of this particular project?

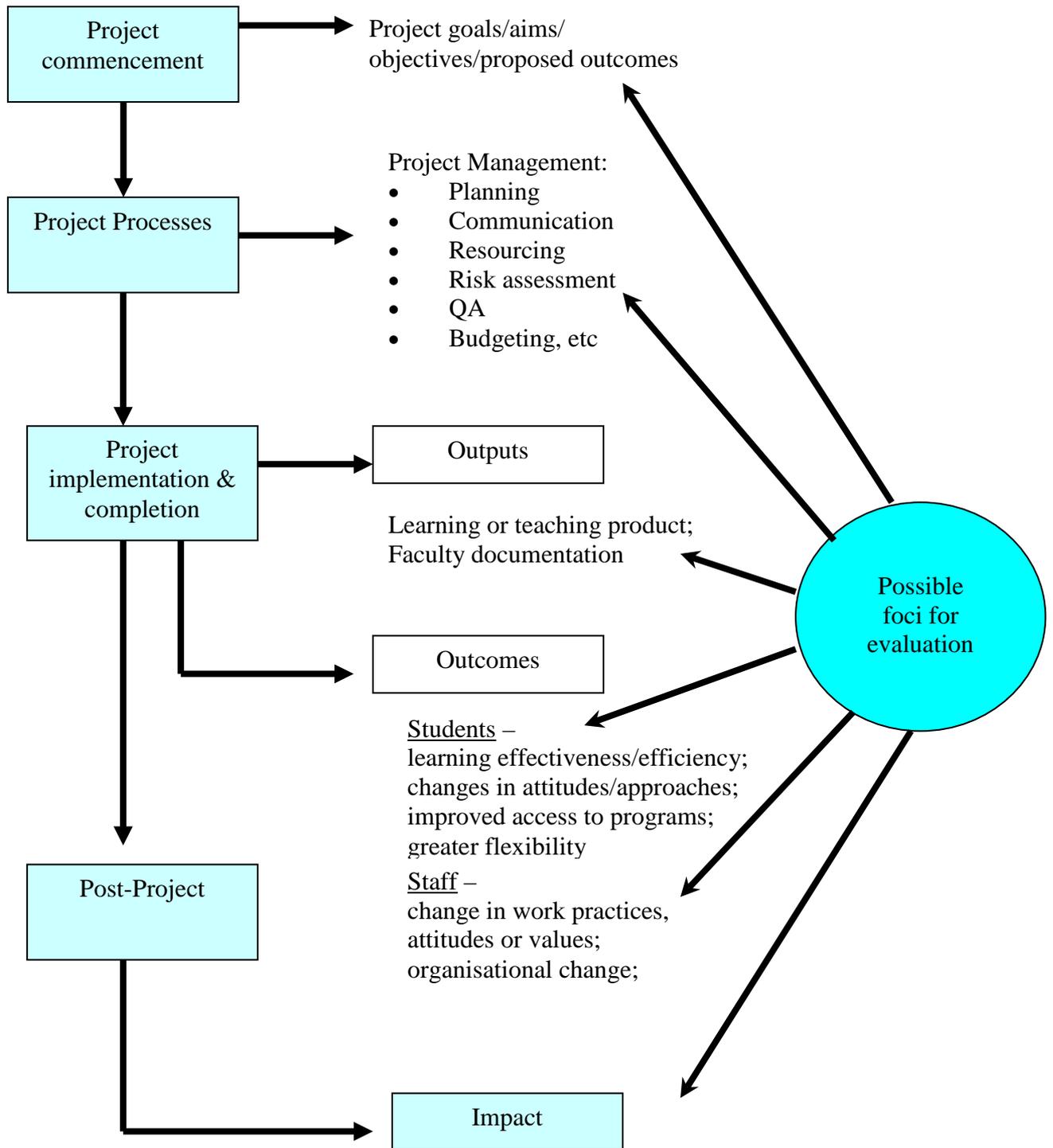
Owen (2006) outlines the following five main forms of evaluation studies³ which serve as a very useful framework for identifying the purpose of the study and setting the boundaries for what the study will focus on.

The circumstances of each evaluation differ and it is important to ensure that the methodology fits the type of project and the outcomes to be measured. In designing an evaluation framework, it is necessary to bear in mind that there are a number of forms of evaluation. Evaluations can be **proactive** in order to scope the environment in which the project is to take place. Still in the early stages of a proposal, another form of evaluation is to **clarify** the objectives and ensure that the outcomes and the objectives are logically connected. Once a project is operative, it may be necessary to modify the design and an **interactive** form of evaluation is used to obtain data from the participants to establish if the design of the project is working well or needs to be changed. To ensure that the project meets its objectives it is necessary to **monitor** the progress of the project being evaluated. Finally, and most commonly, the **impact** of the project may have to be measured to ascertain if the objectives have been achieved and whether any modifications are recommended for the future. Most evaluations will focus on more than one of these forms.

The eventual form of the evaluation activity is determined by the focus of the evaluation and the scope. The scope refers to the boundaries of the evaluation activities, e.g. timeframe, discipline area(s), extent of measurement, etc. Figure 1 attempts to bring together aspects of the project and the evaluation activities to identify different foci for the evaluation activities. Most learning and teaching projects will have more than one focus for the evaluation activities.

³ These forms of evaluation are derived from the work of Owen published in Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches (2006).

Figure 1. Learning and teaching project evaluation framework



Adapted from the University of Tasmania Project Evaluation Toolkit website:
<http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/elearning/evaluating-projects>.

3. Who are the stakeholders for the project and the audiences for the evaluation information?

Who has an interest or stake in the project and/or its outcomes, and in the evaluation of the project?

Stakeholders are individuals/groups/organisations that have something significant to gain or lose in relation to the project and therefore the evaluation. As such, their interests must be considered in evaluating the program.

Who will be interested in the results of the study and what types of information do they expect from the evaluation?

Audiences are individuals/groups/organisations whose information needs are specifically being addressed in the evaluation. They will overlap considerably with the stakeholders, but should be viewed here as individuals and groups who receive information from the study and therefore should guide the manner in which information is produced and disseminated.

How should competing interests be prioritised?

In project evaluation activities, there is a need to identify the primary and secondary stakeholders and audiences of the evaluation. In learning and teaching projects, students and staff are usually the key stakeholders although families, employers, and members of the wider community may also be legitimate stakeholders. It is unlikely the needs of each stakeholder group can be fully addressed in a single evaluation, so it is often useful to identify one or two primary stakeholders whose needs will be the focus of the evaluation. These needs should align with the purpose of the evaluation and by ensuring these needs are the focus of the evaluation, the likelihood the results will be used is greatly enhanced (see Patton, 1997, *Utilization-focused evaluation*). The ALTC is a key stakeholder for all its projects and fellowships, and a primary audience.

ALTC as a key stakeholder

The ALTC is a stakeholder for all the projects and fellowships it funds, as it has a clear interest in the quality of what it funds, the extent to what it has funded is delivered and the extent to which intended outcomes are achieved. The ALTC has clearly stated its expectations of the evaluation of projects and fellowships as:

- an external statement on the extent to which project/fellowship outcomes have been achieved;
- understanding of the extent to which the project/fellowship has contributed to the ALTC mission;
- assessment of the project operation, functioning of the project team and development of team members' capacities; and
- demonstration of the project/fellowship having been conducted to high academic standards.

Evaluations of ALTC funded projects and fellowships must address these expectations as a minimum.

4. What are the key evaluation questions which the evaluation will address?

Project evaluation involves gathering information in order to understand and make judgments about the project and its outcomes. The types and extent of information that are needed will depend on the scope of the project (Section 1) and the purposes and scope of the evaluation (Section 2). The information needed will also depend on the specific object(s) of the evaluation, i.e. the particular element(s) or dimension(s) of the project that you wish to evaluate or are required to evaluate under a funding agreement⁴. Thus, for example, the evaluation may focus on the project's design, its implementation processes, its outcomes (short-term and/or longer-term), its impact, or a combination of these.

A further consideration in determining what information to gather relates to the context(s) of the project (Section 1). Gathering information on the nature and influence of the context(s) is critically important in evaluation as this will facilitate a deeper understanding and explanation of the particular outcomes that are achieved and of the factors that have enabled them to occur. This information will also inform predictions about impacts of the project.

It can be helpful initially to categorise the required information in terms of four or five broad areas, or four or five key questions to investigate. Depending on the types and extent of information that is needed, the key questions could include, for example, some of the following.

What processes were planned and what were actually put in place for the project?

Were there any variations from the processes that were initially proposed, and if so, why?

How might the project be improved?

What were the observable short-term outcomes?

To what extent have the intended outcomes been achieved?

Were there any unintended outcomes?

What factors helped and hindered in the achievement of the outcomes?

What measures, if any, have been put in place to promote sustainability of the project's focus and outcomes?

What lessons have been learned from this project and how might these be of assistance to other institutions?

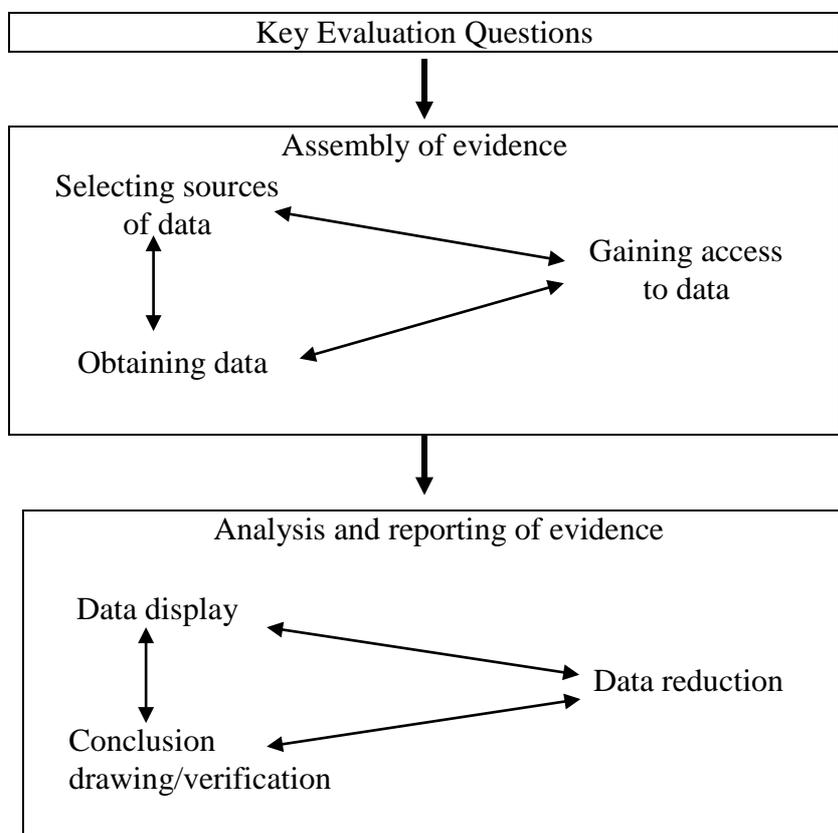
These examples have been expressed in the past tense, implying that they would be asked at the end of the project. They should however also be expressed in the present tense and applied during the project's implementation as part of an ongoing evaluation. While the ongoing evaluation may lead to final summative conclusions and reporting, it may also enable evaluation information to be progressively fed back to the implementation team to assist it in monitoring the project and in adjusting or fine-tuning its operation. Each of the four or five key questions would in turn be broken down into a number of specific sub-questions as part of the more detailed data collection planning (Section 5).

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⁴Note: Current ALTC Grants and Fellowships Guidelines indicate that the final project reports should include, amongst other things, 'an analysis of the factors that were critical to the success of the approach and of factors that impeded its success' and 'an analysis of the extent to which the approach is amenable to implementation in a variety of institutions'.

5. How will the information be collected and analysed?

The process of data collection and analysis in evaluation can be termed 'data management' as described in the following diagram.

Figure 2. Data Management Framework



Adapted from Owen, 2006, p.99.

The starting point for this process is the set of key evaluation questions identified in Section 4. The data in an evaluation is collected primarily to address these questions.

The data assembly process comes next and involves identifying the data sources, gaining access to the necessary data and obtaining the data in a useful form. Each of these elements of the process has a number of steps - too many to list here - however, it is useful to address several common questions.

What/who are the data sources?

In many ALTC projects, students and staff will be the primary data sources but documents and other stakeholders may also be useful sources of information. Due to the small size of many ALTC projects, all students and staff participating will be able to be approached to provide data and sampling therefore will not be an issue. If the population of any data source is too large then sampling will be required. Probability sampling (random or some variation of it) will usually be the best approach for quantitative information and explanatory analysis, whereas qualitative information and descriptive analysis are often served better by non-probability (purposive) sampling (see social science research texts for more detailed guidance on sampling - <http://dissertation.laerd.com/sampling-strategy.php>). The ready

availability of existing data may make it generally preferred in evaluation studies, especially if it is accepted as appropriate and of high quality by stakeholders. However, where existing data is of poor quality or not available then new data must be collected, and this is generally more expensive and time consuming. Issues of the quality of any data used in the evaluation should be explicitly addressed in reporting the evaluation.

What types of data are most appropriate?

The data to be collected will depend on the key evaluation questions. In most evaluations, a combination of qualitative and quantitative information is collected, as required by the different questions being addressed. There is no a priori preference for one type of data over another, and both quantitative and qualitative data have standards of quality (see Guba and Lincoln's Fourth Generation Evaluation for a discussion of the indicators of data quality).

What are the most appropriate methods of data collection?

The process of actually collecting the data is often the focus of most discussion and controversy but if the process of identification and access are properly addressed, the process of obtaining the data is much less problematic. There are a wide range of methods of obtaining data, see the *LTDI Evaluation Cookbook* for suggestions on different methods and how to analyse the data collected:

<http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/ltidi/cookbook>

The objective of the evaluation is to answer each of the key evaluation questions, so a matrix might be developed mapping each question against potential sources of information. A sample for such a matrix is provided in Figure 3. The matrix enables identification of overlaps in data collection and the development of more efficient processes.

Figure 3 Sample Data Source Matrix

Key Evaluation Question \ Source of Information	Steering Committee members	Students	Staff	Existing documents	Other stakeholders
1. To what extent has the project been implemented as planned?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. How well as the project been co-ordinated across different institutions/schools?	✓		✓		✓
3. How appropriate were the project activities in relation to staff capabilities and the institution's ITC structures?	✓		✓	✓	✓
4. How well have the needs of staff been met?			✓		
5. To what extent have students been engaged in the project activities?		✓	✓		
6. To what extent have the intended student learning outcomes been achieved?		✓	✓		

How will the data be analysed and presented in order to address the key evaluation questions?

According to Owen's model (Figure 2), the second part of data management is analysis and reporting, which has three components; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

The general data analysis process in evaluation is one of reduction- that is, 'the process of simplifying and transforming the raw information according to some logical set of procedures or rules' (Owen 2006: 101). There are a wide range of processes for data reduction for both quantitative and qualitative information. The processes used must be explicitly described when reporting the data analysis results. There are two general purposes for data analysis in evaluation; description and explanation. Both are important because description enables the audience to understand the project, its intended processes and outcomes, and the extent to which these were achieved, whereas explanation provides evidence about the underlying logic of the project and the extent to which it is sustainable, transferable and/or reproducible.

The display of data is a process of organising the information in ways that lead to the drawing of explicit and defensible conclusions about the key evaluation questions. In many evaluations, conclusions are the endpoint, however in others, the evaluators go further to offer recommendations about the project. The former require placing values on the conclusions such as stating the project is successful or not, whereas, the latter are advice or suggestions for courses of action made to decision makers.

What ethical issues are involved in the evaluation and how will they addressed?

Ethical issues often arise in the data management process described above e.g. in the selection of data sources, obtaining the information or reporting results. Data collection activities in ALTC funded projects will usually require approval from the lead institution's research ethics committee, and may require complementary approval from partner institutions. The main issues which are likely to arise include appropriate methods of collecting, analysing, storing and reporting data from students to protect their confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring students and staff are not impacted unfairly by the evaluation activities (avoiding interruptions to the learning and teaching processes), and unfairly disadvantaging students who are not receiving the project benefits. The Australasian Evaluation Society has produced a Code of Conduct and a set of Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations, which provide useful guidance for evaluation activities. These are widely used in the conduct of evaluations in Australia and New Zealand and are available at: <http://www.aes.asn.au/about/>.

6. What are the criteria for making judgments about the findings of the evaluation?

The making of judgments lies at the core of evaluation. For project evaluation, this may involve, for example, making judgments on the project outcomes, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the project's processes, determining how well the project has met stakeholder needs, or deciding the extent to which the project outcomes are sustainable. Such judgments will play a key role in any decision-making that the evaluation is intended to inform. In general, judgments will be required for each key evaluation question.

In planning an evaluation, it is important to identify the standards by which such judgments will be made, i.e. the evaluation criteria. Examples of evaluation criteria include:

- achievement of the project goals, objectives or intended outcomes
- needs of stakeholders such as students, staff and the funding body
- set standards in the specific field of the project
- best or good practice
- ideals or social/political values and expectations
- the quality of alternatives
- relevance
- effectiveness
- efficiency
- appropriateness
- sustainability
- potential usability for others
- dissemination among stakeholders.

Often these criteria are expressed in terms of extent of achievement or performance, for example,

To what extent have the intended student learning outcomes been achieved?

How well have the needs of staff been met?

How appropriate were the project activities in relation to staff capabilities and the institution's ICT structures?

Often more than one criterion will be adopted for an evaluation, depending on the nature and range of judgments required. Once the particular criteria have been selected, further specification is normally needed in order to clarify how they will be applied. Thus, for example,

Extent to which the needs of staff, students and the funding body have been met – specification of particular groups of staff and students, and of the specific needs of each group that provide the focus.

Set standards in the specific field of the project – identification of particular standards and the actual levels that are regarded as acceptable.

Best or good practice – naming of the locations or source(s) of the practices adopted as the benchmark, and of the particular dimensions or aspects of those practices that will be used for comparison purposes.

Relevance or effectiveness or efficiency, in terms of specific project processes and outcomes

Sustainability – identification of what aspects are deemed worthy of sustaining, e.g. particular outcomes or project structures or associated changes in approaches.

Ideally, the level of specification would be such as to enable direct measurement, using either qualitative or quantitative information or both, and judgment. Not all criteria are necessarily amenable however to this level of specification. At times it will be a matter of identifying a number of indicators of performance that together will enable the evaluator to make the judgment.

7. What resources and skills are required to conduct the evaluation?

In planning a project, consideration needs to be given to the human, material and other resources needed both for the overall project and for its evaluation component. Planning the budget in detail for the evaluation component will enable the insertion of an evaluation line item in the overall budget. Careful costing of each of the proposed project activities and of the project's operation and management needs to be carried out to ensure that the project is feasible, and that its budget components can be justified. Reference should be made to the applicable ALTC Grants and Fellowships Program Guidelines that list the items for which the budget can provide, along with certain specified maximum amounts and rates, plus items for which grants may not be used.

The costs of an evaluation of a project or fellowship program should be developed as part of the funding submission. These should include a rate for the evaluator, travel costs, costs of materials, and costs for any additional expertise or specialised services. Given the evaluation reports will generally not be published separately, the costs of report production should be included in this line of the project/fellowship program budget. In general, evaluations have been allocated about 5 per cent of the overall budget in many recent ALTC projects but this may vary depending on the role of the evaluator and any special requirements.

Who will conduct the evaluation?

This is a key question underpinning the budget. This may be considered in terms of two sub-questions –

i. Should the evaluation be undertaken by an individual or by a team?

There are advantages and disadvantages for each option. Having a team means finding common times for meetings and other activities, developing shared understanding on procedures, data analysis and findings, pulling together possibly different writing styles, and meeting joint deadlines. Working as an individual removes these constraints. A team however may enable the evaluation to tap into a range of specialist skills relating to planning, data gathering and analysis, and reporting, which the individual may not necessarily have to the same levels. The range of skills may also enable allocation of specific tasks to team members, thereby sharing the load and individual time commitment. A team may also provide a variety of perspectives that can be brought to the evaluation, providing an inbuilt 'sounding board'. However, given the amount normally budgeted for evaluation (seldom more than \$10,000 in recent ALTC projects), it may not be possible to afford more than one person to undertake the evaluation.

ii. Should the evaluation be undertaken by insiders or outsiders?

An insider is defined here as anyone who is directly involved in the operation of the project being evaluated or who has a direct stake in the project's outcomes. An outsider is defined as anyone who is **not** directly involved in the development or operation of the project being evaluated or who does **not** have a direct stake in the project's outcomes. Therefore members of the project team, the reference group, or staff who are participants in the project should not be considered independent of the project/fellowship.

Insiders may be located externally as well as internally. An example of an external insider would be an outside organisation providing professional services of a type that would be needed if the project were deemed to be a success and its operation extended e.g. a professional association. By the same token, outsiders may be

located internally as well as externally. An example of an internal outsider would be an individual in the project institution from another Faculty or School who has no actual, potential or perceived stake in the project or its evaluation outcomes.

Insiders, particularly internal insiders, carry advantages in that they often will have detailed understanding of the context in which the project is operating, along with ready-made points of contact for information gathering. Being known to the parties involved, they may be seen as less threatening and thus find it easier to elicit information. Their involvement may moreover be costed at a relatively low level, to the extent that it is seen as a part or an extension of their continuing substantive role in the institution.

Having a direct stake in the project or the evaluation's outcomes raises however the issues of actual, potential and perceived conflict of interest. Essentially the insider cannot be seen as providing an evaluation that is independent because by definition the insider has a stake in the project outcomes. This raises questions of credibility and reliability, which in turn may diminish the usefulness of the evaluation's findings in informing future decision-making. Independence is however largely a matter of professional practice and an evaluator needs to ensure they conduct the evaluation according to high professional standards of ethics, trustworthiness, honesty, analytical rigour, and transparency. Where this is demonstrated in practice and in the evaluation reports, the extent of institutional independence of the evaluator becomes less of an issue.

Involving an outsider will help in establishing an independent process. An independent process is desirable in any project evaluation, and for projects receiving ALTC funding of more than \$120,000 it stands as a formal requirement⁵.

Involving an outsider also carries other advantages. It may enable the acquisition of specialist evaluation expertise and experience that may not be present to the same extent among insiders, or at least not readily available at the time when it is needed. Outsiders can bring new perspectives and a sense of impartiality to the evaluation, coming with fresh eyes to the project and its operation.

Consideration might also be given in large or complex studies to establishing an evaluation team that includes both insider and outsider members, to capitalise on the advantages of both sources – detailed understanding of the project's operating context, ease of access to information, a range of skills and perspectives, and a degree of impartiality.

Finally, in relation to gaining access to outsider expertise, the role of the Project Reference Group warrants close consideration. The current Grants Program Guidelines state that

All project teams should appoint a reference group. The reference group should include some external participants who have appropriate expertise to ensure there is constructive advice on the design, development and ongoing evaluation of the project and to ensure the project has maximum impact within the institution/s engaged in the project and beyond those institutions.

While the Reference Group will not carry out the evaluation, careful selection of its outsider members should provide a useful sounding board and sources of expert advice in relation to the evaluation's development and implementation.

⁵ Current ALTC Grants Program Guidelines state that "recipients of grants in excess of \$120,000 are required to commission a formal independent evaluation of the project. This may be funded from the ALTC grant and should be included in the project proposal budget."

What are the key issues to consider in engaging an evaluator?

A first step in engaging an evaluator is to prepare an **evaluation brief** or **terms of reference**. This is a statement that should give a prospective evaluator sufficient information to prepare an evaluation proposal. It is important not to be too specific in relation to the evaluation methodology in the statement, leaving some freedom for the prospective evaluator to use his/her expertise and experience to propose detailed ways of proceeding.

The evaluation brief or terms of reference would normally include at least the following:

- a brief outline of the project (background, processes, outputs, timeline and intended outcomes);
- the purpose(s), focus and scope of the evaluation;
- any preferred or required information gathering sources and techniques;
- the roles of the Project Manager, Project Team and the Project Reference Group in relation to the evaluation and to the evaluator;
- reporting requirements and timelines;
- the budget available for the evaluation (generally 5-10 per cent of the project budget); and
- qualities expected of the evaluator.

The qualities expected of the evaluator include those expected of evaluators in general as well as those that relate to the particular project. The qualities would thus normally include:

- project evaluation experience in higher education, and ideally in the discipline or area of the project;
- broad understanding of the discipline or area of the project;
- skills in quantitative and/or qualitative data analysis, as appropriate to the project;
- high level oral and written communication skills;
- independence;
- capacity to meet the project's evaluation timelines; and
- willingness and capacity to work with the Project Manager, Project Team and the Project Reference Group, as required.

The ALTC has developed a database of individuals who have undertaken evaluation of funded projects and fellowships to assist project leaders and fellows to identify potential evaluators. There is no requirement to select an evaluator from this list if another suitably qualified and experienced individual is available.

At what stage of the project should the evaluator become involved?

The evaluator should be involved in discussions with the project team or fellow as early as possible, and ideally before the project is underway. In some cases, an internal evaluator may be already known and could be involved in the application or nomination. This allows for critical examination and shared understanding and endorsement of the details of the evaluation. It also enables timely planning of how the evaluation procedures can dovetail with the project and become an integral part

of it rather than an add-on. The evaluator at this stage can act as a sounding board, asking questions that will enable greater clarity and precision to be attached to planned processes and outcomes. Early and continuing involvement of the evaluator along these lines should also deepen the evaluator's understanding of the project or fellowship context, thereby further developing the potential of the evaluation to generate rich insights into the factors influencing the project or fellowship outcomes.

Costing an evaluation

The costs of a project evaluation are largely to cover the time spent by the evaluator carrying out their activities, including attending meetings and project activities, reading and analysing documents, collecting and analysing data, and writing reports. In addition, there may be travel costs and the production costs of reports although these may be incorporated in other areas of the project budget. Therefore, calculating the budget for an evaluation is primarily an exercise in outlining the extent to which the evaluator will be expected to be involved in project activities, the extent to which they will collect and analyse new data, and the amount of time they will need to prepare their reports. The practice in many recent ALTC projects and fellowships has been to budget between \$5000 and \$10,000 for the evaluation and then negotiate the evaluation plan within this budget. Experience suggests that in many cases this funding does not cover the full costs of the evaluator and there is some institutional or personal contribution required to cover the evaluation activities.

8. How will the evaluation findings be disseminated?

The potential impact of the results of the evaluation depend in part on the effectiveness of their dissemination. Planning for this involves consideration of a number of issues.

Who are the audiences for reports on the evaluation and what are their particular needs and interests?

The potential audiences comprise all parties whose information needs are specifically addressed in the evaluation, and these may cover the areas of project development, resourcing, implementation or outcomes. Each audience will tend to have specific information needs and interests, as well as some in common with each other. It is helpful to identify the specific audiences and their range of needs and interests, so that any reporting can be focused and relevant for those audiences. This may well involve different reporting for different audiences, in terms of reporting strategies, timing and information focus.

What are the functions of reporting?

Reporting can perform a number of functions. These include:

- To contribute to a formative evaluation strategy in which preliminary reports during the course of the project serve to inform fine-tuning and modification of the project's processes.
- To assist in engaging stakeholders and in maximising their potential acceptance and use of the final findings by keeping them in touch throughout the project.
- To share key findings and experiences from the project with other institutions and individuals who may be able to learn and benefit from these.
- To demonstrate accountability for the use of resources in the project.

What reporting strategies will be used?

The strategies adopted will depend on the particular reporting functions and the requirements of the funding body. Possibilities include formal written reports, informal reports at forums and other gatherings, regular newsletter progress reports, journal articles and other publications, and oral briefings.

Under the current ALTC Grants and Fellowships Program Guidelines, "institutions are required to provide regular performance reports (progress reports) and a final written report on the conduct of the project, as specified in the funding agreement". The evaluation process should provide significant input for these reports.

When will reporting take place?

As indicated above, regular reporting during as well as at the end of the project will enable a range of functions to be addressed. Any reporting during the project may need to be qualified to the extent that the evaluation data collection and analysis processes are incomplete. Progressively, the reporting focus may be able to shift from processes to outcomes.

What kinds of information will be included in evaluation reports?

The current ALTC Grants and Fellowships Program Guidelines list what should be included in the final project report. The list includes items that will be directly informed by the evaluation process.

A formal final evaluation report would generally be expected to include the following kinds of information:

- Background to the project
- Context of the project's operation
- Purpose of the evaluation
- Lists of stakeholders and audiences
- Key evaluation questions
- Information gathering sources and techniques for the evaluation
- Data analysis procedures
- Criteria for judgments
- Findings (summary of information/evidence) and conclusions/judgments
- Recommendations
- Supplementary material (appendices)

Consideration could also be given to including visual material and direct quotes from participants, to the extent that these will enliven the report and help to bring the reader more directly into the evaluation and its findings.

The ALTC final report template indicates that an independent evaluation report be included as an attachment to the final project report, for project grants in excess of \$120,000 (<http://www.altc.edu.au/managing-your-project>). This is an efficient strategy and allows readers to see the two documents in context. However, the evaluation report remains the responsibility of the evaluation consultant and should be clearly attributed as so. Varied examples of evaluation reports of fellowships and projects are available at <http://www.altc.edu.au>.

9. What is the timeline for the evaluation activities?

Given the resources and project plan, what will be achieved at key times/points during the evaluation?

A timeline is an essential element of an evaluation plan and should be negotiated with the key stakeholder groups. It enables both the project staff and the evaluation staff to schedule the major activities required to complete the evaluation on time and within budget and to track these to ensure there is a smooth flow of activities. A sample timeline for an independent evaluation is provided in Figure 4. It demonstrates the different evaluation activities that will take place during the three phases of this project as well as the key reporting deadlines.

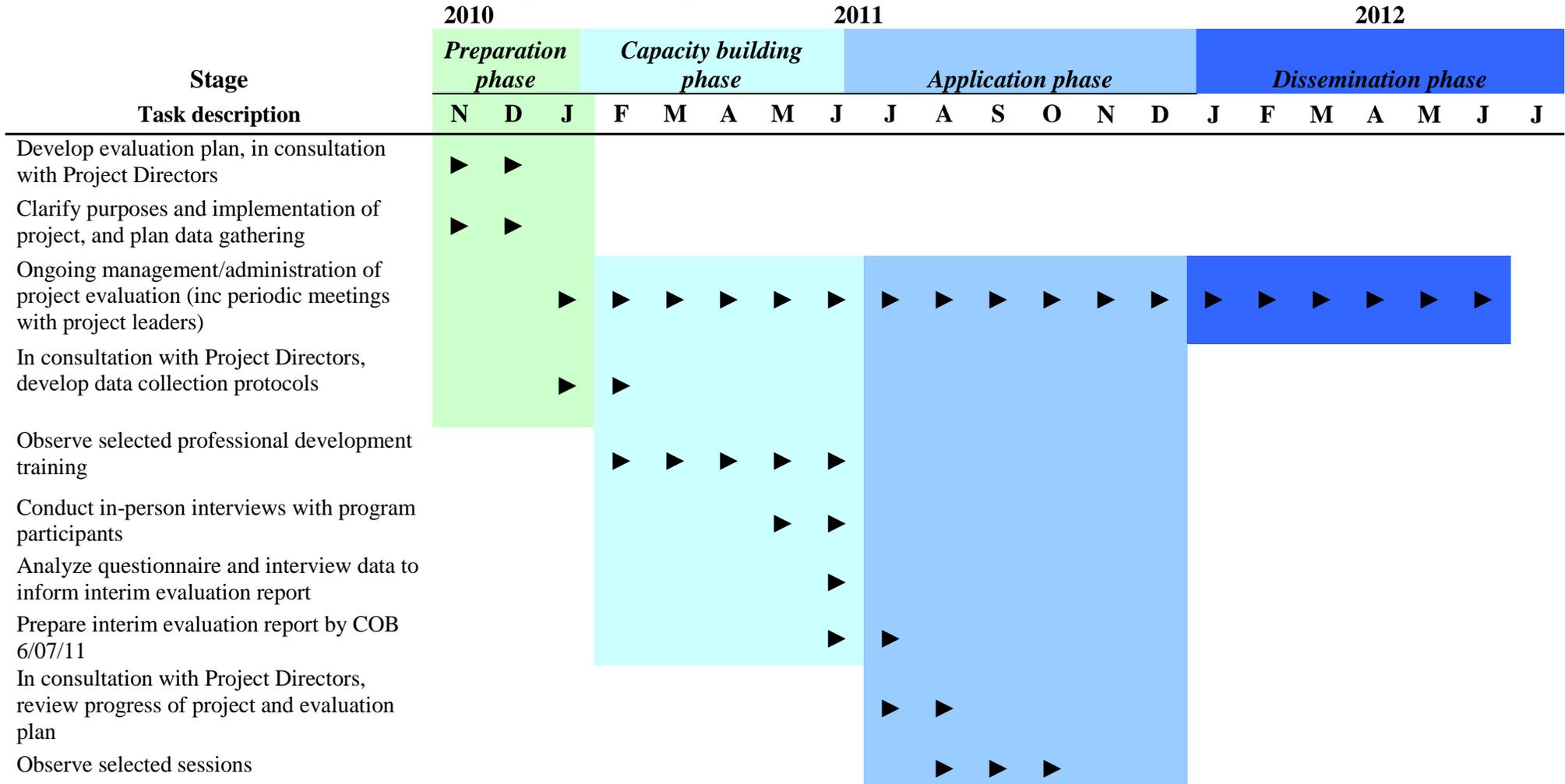
10. Is the evaluation plan internally coherent and of high quality?

Once the evaluation plan is drafted, it is useful to review it to ensure it is internally coherent and is likely to lead to a high quality evaluation. A set of quality standards have been developed for program evaluation studies which are also appropriate for project evaluation. The standards were developed by a committee of leading evaluators in the 1990s in the US and have stood the test of considerable research and review since then. These standards are available in a monograph but are also summarised online at: The Program Evaluation Standards: <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/jc/>. This site and the standards monograph have a wealth of useful information on how the standards might be applied in actual evaluation situations.

The Project Evaluation toolkit (<http://www.utas.edu.au>) from the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning at the University of Tasmania identifies a useful list of indicators for successful evaluation planning:

- key questions for investigation;
- a set of evaluation criteria;
- the involvement of major stakeholders in the enterprise;
- a variety of data gathering and analysis tools to be used; and
- the confidence that evaluation results will be of use, and will be used, by those that need them.

Figure 4. Project Evaluation Tasks, 2010-2012



Stage Task description	2010			2011							2012										
	<i>Preparation phase</i>			<i>Capacity building phase</i>				<i>Application phase</i>						<i>Dissemination phase</i>							
	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J
Refine interview protocols for use with program participants, post project implementation											▶	▶									
Conduct second round of interviews												▶	▶								
Review project documents and data collected to inform evaluation report on Stage 2 of the project, with particular attention to project outcomes													▶	▶							
Prepare interim evaluation report on Stage 2 by 6/02/12															▶	▶					
In consultation with Project Directors, develop evaluation indicators and targets for use in Stage 3																▶	▶				
Prepare interim evaluation report on Stage 3 by 8/06/12																		▶	▶	▶	
Review all qualitative and quantitative data gathered and analyzed over the duration of the project, and re-compare to project aims and objectives																			▶	▶	
Prepare summative evaluation report for the project by 15/08/12																				▶	▶

11. Useful References

Cummings, R. & English, B. (1999) A Framework for Selecting an Appropriate Design for a Program Evaluation Study, *Evaluation News and Comment*, Vol 7, No 2, pp. 12-19.

Funnell, S. (1997) Program Logic: an adaptable tool, *Evaluation News and Comment*, Vol 6, No 1, pp. 5-17.

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12. Useful Resources on Evaluation

Action Research Resources: <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html>

Accessed 15 August 2011

A website collection of action research resources maintained at Southern Cross University by Bob Dick.

The Australasian Evaluation Society (AES): <http://www.aes.asn.au/>

Accessed 15 August 2011

The AES provides a wealth of useful and relevant information including an online journal, calendars of evaluation activities in all Australian States and New Zealand, and helpful resources. The Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Evaluations: <http://www.aes.asn.au/about/> are widely used as a quality check on evaluations. The AES will circulate requests for tenders to its Directory of Evaluation Consultants: <http://www.aes.asn.au/consultants/> or post advertisements for evaluation positions on its website for no charge.

Digital Resources for Evaluators <http://www.resources4evaluators.info/> Accessed 15 August 2011
A US based index of a wide range of evaluation resources from online communities to text books to training courses.

EFX: Evaluation support for FAIR and X4L

<http://www.cerlim.ac.uk/projects/efx/toolkit/index.html> Accessed 15 August 2011

A website of support materials for projects funded under the Joint Information Systems Committee's [FAIR](#) and [X4L](#) Programmes in the UK.

The Evaluation Center (Western Michigan University USA):

<http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/home/> Accessed 15 August 2011

Among the most useful resources available at The Evaluation Center are The Checklists for Evaluation website: <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/>

Finding & Working with an Evaluator

<http://meera.snre.umich.edu/plan-an-evaluation/plonearticlemultipage.2007-10-30.3630902539/finding-working-with-an-evaluator> Accessed 15 August 2011

A paper by Higgs, A. (2006). MEERA, University of Michigan.

Guide to Project Evaluation: A Participatory Approach, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/resources-ressources/guide/index-eng.php> Accessed 15 August 2011

Public Health Agency of Canada

Learning Technology Dissemination Initiative (LTDI) Evaluation Cookbook:

<http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/ltdi/cookbook/> Accessed 15 August 2011

A practical guide to evaluation methods for lecturers at Heriot-Watt University in Scotland. Includes some exemplars of particular evaluation methods in practice.

National Science Foundation's User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation:

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/start.htm> Accessed 15 August 2011

Good overview of different approaches to project evaluation and to the generic evaluation process.

Project Evaluation Toolkit University of Tasmania

<http://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/elearning/evaluating-projects> Accessed 15 August 2011

Selecting and Managing an Evaluation Consultant or Team.

<http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/115645009918Guideline.pdf>

Accessed 15 August 2011.

A generic document produced by the Evaluation Unit of the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada in 2004 outlining good practice in selecting and working with an evaluation consultant.