



United States Institute of Peace Evaluation Policy

December 10, 2012

The mission of USIP is to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent international conflict. The goal of the Evaluation Policy is to improve USIP's ability to fulfill that mission. It does so by setting out a commitment to learn from what we do in order to have a greater impact, to make programming decisions based on evidence, to inform the broader peacebuilding field, and to hold ourselves accountable to the communities where we work, to our partners, and to our funders.

I. USIP's Unique Position

The unique status of USIP impacts how it approaches evaluation in several important ways:¹

- *USIP works in dynamic conflict and post-conflict contexts:* By their very nature, the contexts where USIP operates are dynamic, rapidly-changing, and often dangerous. Creating positive change in these contexts is often a long-term, non-linear endeavor. These realities create the need for creative evaluation strategies that are adaptable, produce ongoing feedback, and are sensitive to the needs of the communities where USIP works.
- *USIP is Congressionally-funded and ultimately responsible to US taxpayers:* As an institution founded and funded by Congress, USIP has a unique responsibility to effectively steward public resources to reduce violence and promote peace around the world. In a resource-constrained environment, USIP is under increasing pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of its

¹ The term evaluation in this document is used in a broad sense that encompasses both monitoring and evaluation activities.

programming and to show that it is using credible evidence to make strategic decisions and set programmatic priorities.

- *USIP is a small, agile institution designed to catalyze and empower other actors:* USIP is small in comparison to the problems it seeks to confront. The Institute's value added often comes in catalyzing the activities of other actors, providing action-oriented research and analysis, and piloting ideas that, if proven effective, can be scaled up by larger organizations. Such a strategy requires effective evaluation of potentially important innovations, but also creates challenges as the eventual impact is often achieved through policymakers' use of USIP's analysis or through USIP's broad array of partner organizations.
- *USIP fulfills its mission through a wide range of program strategies:* Program strategies at USIP include academic and policy research, field-based peacebuilding, education and training, public education and outreach, grantmaking, and fellowship programs. Virtually no other nonprofit institution has this broad a set of programming strategies, each of which requires different evaluation strategies.
- *USIP is a leading institution within the peacebuilding field:* Within the United States, USIP is considered by many to be the leading institution within the peacebuilding field. As a result, it has a unique responsibility to use evaluation to professionalize the practice of peacebuilding, to be the keeper of best practices, and to develop and promote new innovations in the field.

II. Purposes

Evaluation at USIP serves two core purposes: accountability and learning.

- *Accountability:* Evaluation is a core tool by which USIP manages its multiple accountabilities to the communities where we work, to our funders, to our partners, and to ourselves as professionals. In the course of our work, we make commitments to each of these groups. Evaluation is necessary to assess the extent to which we are living up to those commitments.
- *Learning:* USIP has limited resources and limited reach. As a result, we are committed to learning if our programming is having a positive impact so that we can more effectively use those limited resources. Moreover, USIP works in dynamic, sensitive conflict contexts where actions can have both positive and negative consequences. These contexts demand constant self-reflection about our programming in order to learn what types of impact our programs are having and why. This learning then informs future program implementation (how we work) and strategic decisions (what we do and where). Finally, we are committed to share our learning with the broader peacebuilding field and with both domestic and international policy communities.

III. Principles

This policy applies to USIP projects and programs. Projects are defined as a coherent set of activities designed to achieve an articulated goal. Projects have a budget and receive funding from the base budget or an external partner. This definition is consistent with the existing use of the term at USIP, for example, in the Project Tracking System. Programs are a collection of projects that are designed to achieve a broader set of goals. Programs are normally organized around a geographic area and/or a peacebuilding sector or approach.

All programs and projects at USIP must have an evaluative component. However, there is no one-size-fits-all method of evaluation at USIP. Our approach is to take into account the particular size, nature, and context of each program or project when developing evaluation strategies. A core principle in developing evaluation strategies is to maintain a lean process that does not overwhelm staff with overly complex evaluation requirements, but that nonetheless succeeds in documenting the contribution made by USIP programming in improving decisionmaking and in informing the peacebuilding field more generally. Despite there being a wide range of evaluation strategies at USIP, there is nonetheless a core set of principles that are applicable to all of our evaluation activities.

- *Honest and Unbiased:* USIP strives to be unbiased in conducting our evaluations and in the use and dissemination of evaluation results. We are willing to look honestly at the results of our programs and to report honestly on what we find. We always strive for success, but given the mission of USIP and the innovative nature of USIP programming, we expect some programs to fall short of initial expectations. We are committed to learning from those setbacks in order to improve future programming.
- *Relevant and Useful:* Evaluations that are not useful will not be undertaken. Evaluation activities must be relevant to program staff, providing important input into staff decisions. Evaluations should add value to programs and projects by providing useful information, as opposed to hindering implementation through, for instance, the ineffective use of staff time or the undermining of relationships in the field.
- *Do No Harm:* In designing our evaluation activities, we always seek to do no harm to individuals, to organizations, or to the effectiveness of the program or project.
- *Designed to Build Local Capacity:* Where possible, evaluations are designed to enhance local capacity. This is done by engaging communities in the design and implementation of evaluation activities, using local researchers, and committing to the meaningful sharing of evaluation results with local stakeholders.
- *Transparent:* USIP is transparent in describing the purpose of the evaluation activities we are undertaking and in sharing evaluation results as widely as possible while adhering to the principle of do no harm.

- *Creative and Adaptive:* In line with USIP’s overall values, evaluation at the Institute is creative, adaptive, and guided by concrete problems. As with all of our programming, we are committed to developing innovative new approaches to addressing our evaluation challenges.
- *Holistic:* Evaluation at USIP does not just take place after a project is completed, but is also undertaken throughout the life of the program or project. This begins with integrating evaluation into programming at the design stage. Programs and projects are designed from the beginning to be evaluatable through an evidence-based process that articulates a clear theory of change and a clear set of program or project objectives.

IV: Evaluation Standards

In addition to adhering to these basic principles, USIP has minimum standards that it requires of evaluation strategies for projects whose budgets are above \$10,000. These are standards that USIP sets for itself. Different funding partners might ask for more or less in regard to evaluation, but these standards apply to every program and project above \$10,000 at USIP, regardless of the funder. Smaller projects should still include a reflective component, but do not need a full evaluation strategy.

All evaluation strategies should include:

- A set of objectives that are linked to a broader theory of change.
- A set of evaluation questions that addresses the results of the program or project at both the output and outcome level.
- A set of indicators and a data collection strategy to assess those indicators.
- A credible research methodology for assessing the data and providing evidence-based answers to the evaluation questions.
- A strategy for using and, if appropriate, disseminating the evaluation findings.

Evaluations should use the research methodology that will generate the most credible evidence, taking into account time pressure, budget, and other practical considerations, including do no harm principles. For evaluations designed to attribute impact to USIP programming, experimental and quasi-experimental methods normally offer the strongest evidence. These methods are applicable primarily where a project is targeting beneficiaries at the individual level and where there are no reputational or security risks involved in speaking with individuals that are not beneficiaries. Although evaluations using experimental methodologies are expensive and can be complex, USIP will conduct evaluations using these methodologies where and when the right opportunities emerge.

Where possible, evaluation strategies should also address “second-loop learning” questions. This means the strategy should assess not only whether the goals set out by the program or project were reached, but also if the goals are relevant to the conflict context, that is, whether they meaningfully address the conflict drivers within that context.

All evaluation strategies include activities conducted by internal USIP staff. Some strategies may also include activities implemented by external evaluation consultants. Evaluation consultants are used primarily when a key priority of the evaluation strategy is to present highly credible results to external audiences.

V. Use of Results

All evaluation activities should inform programmatic decisions. Therefore, USIP will only undertake evaluation activities that are designed to answer important questions, have a clear purpose, and have a clearly identified audience.

Within USIP, the main purpose of evaluation results is to help staff to make better decisions. These decisions include:

- *Allocation of Resources:* Decisions regarding allocation of resources are complex and must take into account many factors. The ability of projects to demonstrate results through credible evaluation is one factor that informs these allocation decisions.
- *Prioritization of Sectors and Conflicts:* Evaluation is undertaken to assess not just whether individual programs are successful, but also what kind of programs and projects USIP should be undertaking in the first place, and in what types of contexts USIP should be operating. Analyzing multiple evaluations over time can answer questions such as: At what phase of the conflict is USIP's programming most effective? What types of conflict are most conducive to USIP-style interventions? What type of programming is USIP most effective at implementing?
- *Project Design:* Results from evaluations feed into the next generation of programs and projects. These results, along with other forms of analysis (field assessments, literature reviews, etc.) all contribute to evidence-based program and project design at USIP.
- *Project Implementation:* Evaluation activities take place throughout the life of a project and therefore are used to inform effective implementation. Particularly in dynamic, fast-changing conflict contexts, continuous feedback to project teams is a necessity.

Outside of USIP, there are several core uses for evaluation results:

- *Educating and Validating Partners:* USIP works with a wide range of partners. A key use of evaluation results is to educate those partners on the effectiveness of their own programming. In addition, including partners in evaluation activities helps validate and professionalize partner organizations, regardless of the results of any one evaluation process.
- *Informing the Field:* Evaluation results are used to inform the broader peacebuilding field as well as relevant policy communities both inside and outside the US.
- *Telling USIP's Story:* Evaluation results are used to communicate USIP's story, both its successes and its failures, as well as the story of peacebuilding more generally. While evaluation is not, nor

ever should be, a public relations tool, evaluation activities do provide evidence-based stories that can be used by the public affairs and outreach departments at the Institute.

VI. Resources

Credible evaluation demands sufficient resources – both money and staff time. Expectations regarding what can be accomplished must always match the level of resources provided.

As noted above, decisions regarding allocation of resources are complex and must take into account many factors. Regarding evaluation, all else being equal, certain types of programs or projects are prioritized to receive more evaluation resources.

- Programs or projects that have larger budgets, are high-profile, and/or are implemented over a longer period of time will receive more evaluation resources.
- Innovative programs or projects that show the potential to be scaled up by other larger actors will receive more evaluation resources.
- Field-based programs or projects are both more expensive to evaluate and have a higher probability of creating unintended negative consequences than US-based outreach, policy, or analytic projects. Therefore, all else being equal, field-based projects will receive more evaluation resources.

Depending on the overall size of the budget, project leads should seek to devote 5-15% of their project budgets to evaluation activities. In addition to this commitment at the project level, the Institute should seek to develop common resources that provide evaluation capacity across multiple projects. The position of Director of Learning and Evaluation is one such common resource. Developing additional common resources will both reduce costs and increase the quality of evaluation at USIP.

VII. Organizational Roles and Responsibilities

For every program or project, the lead staff member has primary responsibility for evaluation. Specifically, the staff lead has responsibility for developing and implementing the evaluation strategy.

The responsibility of the Office of Learning and Evaluation is to support the staff leads with technical expertise, to provide relevant resources, and to help build the capacity of project teams to effectively implement evaluation strategies. Each funder of USIP programming has its own evaluation requirements. It is the responsibility of the Office of Learning and Evaluation to assist staff in meeting the requirements of these funders, while also adhering to the principles and standards described in this Policy.

It is also the responsibility of the Director of Learning and Evaluation to maintain Institute-wide resources on evaluation, such as the internal Learning and Evaluation Resource Site, implement Institute-wide events designed to increase internal capacity and shared learning, and help develop organizational systems that support effective learning and evaluation.

About this Document

Working in concert with the strategic plan of USIP, the Evaluation Policy is intended to clarify for USIP staff the purposes of evaluation, the standards to which USIP will hold itself, and the organizational roles and responsibilities in regard to evaluation at USIP. The policy applies to all programs and projects that are directly related to the core goals of USIP, as laid out in the USIP Strategic Plan. The Policy is not meant to provide operational guidance to departments. The Director of Learning and Evaluation will continue to provide additional supporting documents that provide guidance on implementing specific evaluation strategies.

The Policy was developed in late-2012 through an inclusive, multi-round set of consultations throughout USIP. These consultations were led by the Director of Learning and Evaluation and the Evaluation Core Group. The Policy was approved by the USIP Policy Management Committee on December 7, 2012. The Policy is in effect as of January 1, 2013. After one year, it will be assessed and revised if necessary.