



## A STUDY OF THE SUSTAINED UPTAKE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

How does developmental evaluation work in the USAID context, what factors help and hinder its success, and what is its value to stakeholders?

## RECOMENDATIONS

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from findings and key takeaways of the Uptake DE, the WDI team identified and organized eight overarching recommendations<sup>1</sup> into five themes that follow the implementation path of a DE (**Table 5**). These recommendations are for USAID staff who are deciding whether to utilize the DE approach in their own work, other DE funders, DE implementers, and Developmental Evaluators. Where applicable, recommendations note related resources.<sup>2</sup>

Additional recommendations related to DEPA-MERL’s research findings were also made in the consortium’s first DE pilot with [Family Care First in Cambodia](#). Cumulative recommendations will be shared in the DEPA-MERL consortium’s cross-case comparison report, forthcoming in September 2019.

*Table 1: Key recommendations to strengthen DEs*

Theme	Recommendations
<b>Selecting</b> DE as the evaluative approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confirm that a learning culture exists within the organization before selecting the DE approach.</li> <li>2. Determine the scope of work based on the time frame to best meet stakeholder needs.</li> </ol>
<b>Launching</b> a DE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Select the right Developmental Evaluator for your team.</li> <li>4. Develop familiarity with stakeholders to include them in DE design and implementation.</li> <li>5. Produce quick wins for stakeholders to increase buy-in for the DE.</li> </ol>
<b>Implementing</b> a DE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Acknowledge that the role of the Developmental Evaluator will evolve over time and expect it to do so.</li> </ol>
<b>Utilizing data</b> for decision-making in a DE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Be prepared to help mobilize stakeholders to make data-driven changes.</li> </ol>
<b>Closing out</b> a DE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Take active steps to close out the Developmental Evaluator’s integration with the stakeholder teams.</li> </ol>

<sup>1</sup> The WDI team does not provide a holistic set of recommendations here but rather the most salient, based on the data collected and insights developed.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that DEPA-MERL has not tested or used all resources identified in this report.

## SELECTING DE AS THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH

### I. CONFIRM THAT A LEARNING CULTURE EXISTS WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION BEFORE SELECTING THE DE APPROACH

Findings from the analysis of barriers and enablers support the assertion that stakeholders' willingness and readiness to adapt constituted a critical component for ensuring that the DE was able to function effectively. The data corroborates existing literature stating that a culture of reflective practice and critical thinking at an organization is an essential condition for using the DE approach.<sup>i</sup> The funder, and/or leadership from teams participating in the DE, may find it valuable to survey or interview stakeholders before the launch of a DE to understand the learning culture<sup>3</sup> of the potential teams or organizations who want to participate in a DE.

#### Resources that can help:

- Consider using or adapting questions from the [DEPA-MERL DE Readiness Survey](#), a tool adapted from the Tamarack Community's [DE Diagnostic Checklist](#).<sup>4</sup>
- The Spark Policy Institute's [Readiness for DE assessment tool](#) can also help ascertain whether the contracting mechanism, organizational culture, personalities of stakeholders, and program scope are amenable for program adaptation.

### 2. DETERMINE THE SCOPE OF WORK BASED ON THE TIME FRAME TO BEST MEET STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

Findings from Uptake DE Research Question I suggest that the time frame of the evaluation may influence the value a funder may obtain from a DE and, subsequently, the scope of work. For example, a funder who has enough financial and human resources for only a limited three-month DE engagement may want to focus their evaluation on knowledge management tasks rather than institutional or policy-level changes, which could possibly take longer.

The WDI team would like to add a caveat to this recommendation: The scope of work for a DE can be a living document to align with the program and how its needs unfold with the use of the DE approach. It is indeed good to re-examine both the scope of work and the Developmental Evaluator's role during implementation. To help prioritize the needs of the evaluation, documentation on the scope of work and the Developmental Evaluator's role can be updated with guidelines on how or when the Developmental Evaluator should (or should not) fulfill requests from stakeholders to take on additional evaluative efforts.

#### Resources that can help:

- In his blog, [Seven Steps to Setting up a DE](#), Ashwin Budden reflects on several time-bound considerations related to the DE start-up, based on his work on a USAID project.

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<sup>3</sup> A learning culture exists when both leadership and staff are willing to accept (and learn from) both favorable and unfavorable performance data or program outcomes, and when stakeholders can share uncomfortable information transparently without fear of repercussion from leadership.

<sup>4</sup> The WDI team recommends that this self-reported data also be triangulated with data collected by the Developmental Evaluator.

- If the Developmental Evaluator has trouble prioritizing data, they can gather data through a survey, so stakeholders can prioritize their interests and the needs of the evaluation.

## LAUNCHING A DE

### 3. SELECT THE RIGHT DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR FOR YOUR TEAM

When considering the qualifications and fit of candidates to serve as the Developmental Evaluator, DE funders and managers must examine the depth of a potential evaluator’s “Monitoring and Evaluation toolbox”—that is, the diversity of their technical and nontechnical skills and experiences. Do they have experience implementing both quantitative and qualitative efforts? Specialized skills and experience may be desired, but are they unnecessary?

For example, depending on the envisioned scope of work for the DE, the Developmental Evaluator may (or may not) need to have sectoral experience. In the case of the Uptake DE, substantiators noted that sectoral expertise was not the most relevant skill—rather, it was the Developmental Evaluator’s ability to *recognize “big picture” trends and patterns and facilitate action and adaptation*. If implementing a DE within USAID, it is important to note that a few Uptake substantiators mentioned that it was important to hire an evaluator who could work full time in this role and who had strong knowledge of USAID’s relationship-centric culture—or was able to learn it quickly and be comfortable in and with it.

#### Resources that can help:

- For guidance on selecting the right evaluator, see DEPA-MERL’s [\*Developmental Evaluation in Practice: Tips, Tools, and Templates\*](#). This resource also includes a sample terms of reference (i.e., job description) for a Developmental Evaluator.
- The blog [\*Determine the evaluator qualities\*](#) on [\*BetterEvaluation.org\*](#) is a good primer for identifying Developmental Evaluator skills.

#### GET CREATIVE: CONSIDER PHASING IN FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

One barrier to implementing the DE approach is limited resources—and not just financial capital, but human capital as well. One approach to combating this issue is to use a phased or tiered approach to funding and implementing DEs.

From a financial perspective, this worked successfully in the Uptake DE. The evaluation underwent three phases of expansion and had one financial partner (EIA) that helped set the stage for other Lab teams to financially opt in.

From the perspective of human capital, DE work can be tedious. The full, successful participation of stakeholders was possible because their participation in the evaluation was progressive. Early in the pilot, the Developmental Evaluator took on more of the initial workload and responsibility for encouraging stakeholders to reflect and incorporate data into teams’ discussions. Later, once there was broader support for the evaluation, the Developmental Evaluator transitioned her role such that stakeholders took on more tasks and responsibilities to ensure they were actively engaging in their own data-driven decision-making.

### 4. DEVELOP FAMILIARITY WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO INCLUDE THEM IN DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Evidence from the DEPA-MERL pilots demonstrates that building buy-in for the DE approach is an ongoing process. Success factors for establishing and maintaining buy-in include quickly establishing a physical presence and two-way communication channels between the Developmental Evaluator and stakeholders. In the Uptake DE, the Developmental Evaluator, from the beginning, identified ways to help acculturate the Lab teams to the DE approach and integrate it into their teams. For example, to promote and assess understanding and buy-in for the Uptake DE, the Developmental Evaluator conducted key informant interviews with core members of the Lab teams, as well as key partners, decision-makers, and program implementers. Data

from the analysis of barriers and enablers of the Uptake DE showed that establishing two-way communication channels is a must. Also, acculturation cannot be limited to document review; stakeholders value face-to-face interactions with the Developmental Evaluator. Likewise, the Developmental Evaluator needs to have *high-quality engagements with all stakeholders* to support the *evolving role of the Developmental Evaluator*—from establishing trust with stakeholders to serve in an advisory role, to facilitating actions and co-developing recommendations, to supporting stakeholders during the close of the DE.

## 5. PRODUCE QUICK WINS FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO INCREASE BUY-IN FOR THE DE

The Developmental Evaluator should identify and leverage opportunities to create quick wins—small, rapid activities or deliverables that provide value to stakeholders. Creating quick wins can help the Developmental Evaluator build trust with stakeholders and develop credibility for the DE approach from the start. Data from the Uptake DE revealed that it was important to the stakeholders that the Developmental Evaluator was “*evaluatively minded*” and was able to *recognize "big picture" trends and patterns*. The Developmental Evaluator leveraged these skills to produce quick wins, such as stakeholder maps and timelines of a team’s work. These early wins also helped her develop strong alliances with key persons on the Lab teams and create virtuous cycles. To identify quick-win opportunities, Developmental Evaluators can use systematic data collection techniques—such as key informant interviews, focus groups, or surveys—to identify areas of immediate (and long-term) value-add for stakeholders.

## IMPLEMENTING A DE

### 6. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE ROLE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR WILL EVOLVE OVER TIME AND EXPECT IT TO DO SO

The *evolving role of the Developmental Evaluator* indicates that the Developmental Evaluator is not a typical evaluator who conducts traditional evaluations. As seen in the Uptake DE, the Developmental Evaluator is also a strategic advisor who, in some cases, helped co-implement changes with the Lab teams. During DE, it is valuable to acknowledge how the Developmental Evaluator’s role and relationships with the team evolve. The Developmental Evaluator should consider the impact on their objectivity and/or their scope of responsibilities when providing implementation support. There is a balance to maintain. Having a dedicated evaluator who shares the same values as stakeholders is one of the most valuable aspects of the DE approach. However, becoming too embedded in a team or providing the recommendations rather than facilitating the necessary conversations or co-creating recommendations with stakeholders can threaten the Developmental Evaluator’s ability to objectively serve as a third-party evaluator. The trick is not to let shared values or relationships compromise the Developmental Evaluator’s ability to share data and findings with stakeholders.

## UTILIZING DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING IN A DE

### 7. BE PREPARED TO HELP MOBILIZE STAKEHOLDERS TO MAKE DATA-DRIVEN CHANGES

In DE, the Developmental Evaluator’s work does not stop with the collection of data and facilitation of the development (or co-development) of recommendations based on those findings. Stakeholders’ work does not stop there either. As the WDI team’s data reveal, stakeholders and the Developmental Evaluator need to be prepared to mobilize to facilitate change and adaptation. From the stakeholder’s

perspective, that means recognizing that being “too busy” is a false barrier. The Uptake DE champions realized that busyness was not an excuse for failing to engage in the DE or participate in pause and reflect sessions. From the Developmental Evaluator’s perspective, this means going beyond co-creating the recommendations. In the Uptake DE, the Developmental Evaluator not only advised teams, but also co-created recommendations and co-implemented changes with them. Being prepared to utilize DE data for decision-making can be achieved by a) following up with stakeholders; b) creating space for reflection through, for example, quarterly pause and reflect sessions; and c) engaging in collaborative conversations about the action-oriented opportunities to adapt based on the evaluation’s findings.

## **CLOSING OUT A DE**

### **8. TAKE ACTIVE STEPS TO CLOSE OUT THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR’S INTEGRATION WITH THE STAKEHOLDER TEAMS**

Stakeholders and Developmental Evaluators will want to create an action plan to allow the Developmental Evaluator to close out her integration with the participating DE stakeholder team(s). The Developmental Evaluator may join teams with the sole role of being an evaluator. But, with time, they are likely to build relationships and become an advisor whom stakeholders consult for a variety of reasons. After months of engagement, the Developmental Evaluator may even conduct tasks that become critical to the teams. For an effective DE close, these aspects should be transferred to team staff.

For example, in the Uptake DE, the Developmental Evaluator gave teams multiple reminders of her departure during her last days with them and facilitated workshops to help teams set themselves up for success. These activities included providing additional coaching for individuals and teams. She also worked with teams to build in time to review and prioritize current (or previous) recommendations with stakeholders. Developmental Evaluators should treat the close out of the DE carefully and actively plan for it at least three months prior.

If possible, the Developmental Evaluator should also establish processes in their stakeholder teams so teams continue their learning culture post-DE. For example, the Developmental Evaluator can set up quarterly pause and reflect sessions in the team’s calendar and provide the protocols and tools necessary to conduct the meeting.

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