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## **Evaluations-Standards der Schweizerischen Evaluationsgesellschaft (SEVAL-Standards)**

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# EVALUATION STANDARDS

## OF SEVAL, THE SWISS EVALUATION SOCIETY (SEVAL STANDARDS)

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5 December 2000

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Goals of the Evaluation Standards

The evaluation standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society (henceforth SEVAL Standards) are meant to contribute to the professionalization of evaluation in Switzerland. Adhering to the SEVAL Standards enhances the credibility, quality, and trustworthiness of evaluations. High quality evaluations can only be created when all involved – that is,

- the evaluators themselves,
- those who commission the evaluations, and
- other persons participating in the evaluation

– work together. The SEVAL Standards therefore provide criteria that all persons involved in an evaluation have a duty to uphold.

The SEVAL Standards define the demands placed on an evaluation but do not specify the instruments to be used in it. Ideally, an evaluation will fulfill all the criteria listed in the SEVAL Standards. However, it will not always be possible to heed each Standard equally, and it is thus far more appropriate to adapt the SEVAL Standards to the specific evaluation situation. This can mean certain Standards will be judged insignificant while others will be lent great weight. Whatever the case, the adaptation of the Standards to the specific evaluation situation should be well considered, openly presented, and explicitly justified. Such adaptation should be negotiated and agreed upon at the outset of the evaluation, in a format that includes all who are involved in an evaluation: evaluators, those contracting the evaluation, the addressees of the evaluation, and any others who will be or may become involved in the evaluation.

The SEVAL Standards were explicitly formulated to suit evaluations of all kinds, excepting personnel evaluations. Those who use the SEVAL Standards therefore will need to specify them with respect to the existing needs of the evaluation. This applies not just to the adaptation noted above, but also to specifying the declarations made in the SEVAL

Standards themselves. Such interpretations should be conducted in a transparent and readily understandable manner, such that those external to the evaluation can follow this specification process.

### **The Range of Application of the SEVAL Standards**

The SEVAL Standards are valid for evaluations in general (excepting personnel evaluations), independent of the institutional context, the procedure chosen (e.g., internal or external evaluations) and the specific thematic area. The "object of the evaluation", as understood in the SEVAL Standards, can apply to programs, measures, projects, organizations, institutions, policies, products, materials, or other objects of evaluation, but not to persons.

### **The Addressees of the SEVAL Standards**

The SEVAL Standards are addressed to all those who participate in or influence an evaluation. Thus, the SEVAL Standards are directed to evaluators as well as to those who let evaluation contracts, but also to other persons who can support these Standards (as in those who address evaluation in their teaching or continuing education programs).

### **The Origin of the SEVAL Standards**

The SEVAL Standards are based on the Program Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Joint Committee 1994, 2000). SEVAL created a working group that included representatives from the federal and cantonal administrations, from research universities, and evaluation practitioners in order to carefully discuss the issues surrounding evaluation standards. They appointed a subcommittee to work on the wording and formulation of the SEVAL Standards presented here that were subsequently approved by the working group. The accompanying material contains information about the procedures used as well as a list of those who formulated the Standards here.

### **The Role of SEVAL**

The Swiss Evaluation Society sees the SEVAL Standards as instrument to ensure and promote quality in evaluations. This is not connected with the intent to employ the SEVAL Standards as a tool in the context of accreditation or certification processes. The SEVAL Standards are not suited for such purposes.

SEVAL promotes the use of the SEVAL Standards in Swiss evaluation practice, and contributes to the further development of the Standards through a committee that monitors current developments and, if needed, suggests appropriate revisions of the SEVAL Standards to the SEVAL General Assembly. It is not this monitoring committee's task to watch over compliance with the Standards, and it also has no power to impose sanctions when SEVAL Standards are violated.

## **The SEVAL Standards: An Overview**

The SEVAL Standards fall into four subject groups: Utility (U1 – U8), Feasibility (F1 – F3), Propriety (P1 – P6), and Accuracy (A1 – A10). Each subject group is first briefly summarized and introduced.

The individual Standards in each group are numbered, given a short title, and described in a sentence. An elucidating paragraph designed to clarify the scope of that particular Standard then follows.

The individual Standards as well as the four subject groups Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, and Accuracy are deliberately left unweighted, so that no statements can be made as to the particular importance of any given Standard or subject group. This mode was chosen because the significance of any given Standard or subject group varies from evaluation to evaluation.

Accompanying material follows the description of the Standards, and included:

- a functional overview listing which Standards are particularly relevant to specific evaluation activities. This overview makes it easy to locate the Standards that deserve special attention, for example, if one is planning, or reporting, or managing an evaluation.
- a description of how the SEVAL Standards were derived and adapted from the Program Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994 and 2000). Explicit justifications and reasons for altering these original Standards are stated.
- a transformation table of the alphanumeric designations permitting the SEVAL Standards to be compared with those contained in the German version of the Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee 2000).
- a list of the members of the SEVAL Evaluation Standards Working Group.
- a bibliography.

## THE EVALUATION STANDARDS

### Utility

**The utility standards guarantee that an evaluation is oriented to the information needs of the intended users of the evaluation.**

#### **U1 Identifying Stakeholders**

Those persons participating in, and affected by, an evaluation are identified in order that their interests and needs can be taken into account.

Those persons who should be considered as belonging to the environment of an evaluation include:

- Those who will be making decisions about the future of the object being evaluated (typically those with fiscal authority)
- Those responsible for the conceptualization or structuring of the object being evaluated
- Those involved in the practical implementation of the object under investigation (the project, program, law, product, etc.)
- Those whom the object of evaluation directly or indirectly reaches or is intended to reach (target groups and their social environment)
- Other parties interested in the results of the evaluation, such as decision-makers who are planning similar projects, evaluators, or the public

Such persons, groups, and institutions are called "stakeholders".

#### **U2 Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation**

All who are involved in an evaluation will ensure that the objectives of the evaluation are clear to all stakeholders.

The success of an evaluation crucially depends on how clearly all the stakeholders understand the objectives the evaluation is pursuing. It is the responsibility of the actors involved in an evaluation to communicate these objectives to one another. Such communication will help prevent exaggerated expectations from being placed on the evaluation, particularly by those who are commissioning it. By the same token, those responsible for carrying out the evaluation are thereby also obligated to hold to these stated objectives. Such clarification of objectives will help avoid misunderstandings during the evaluation process.

Clarifying objectives is also of central importance in utilizing a goal-oriented process for conducting the evaluation. Clarifying the objectives of an evaluation is often not fully possible at the outset of an evaluation, but instead calls for a lengthier process that should be regarded as a central element of the evaluation process itself.

#### **U3 Credibility**

Those who conduct evaluations are both competent and trustworthy; this will help ensure the results an evaluation reaches are accorded the highest degree of acceptance and credibility possible.

The trustworthiness of evaluators decisively influences the ability to conduct an evaluation as well as how effective it will be. To be judged trustworthy by the various affected parties, the following characteristics are particularly important for evaluators: having personal integrity, showing independence, and demonstrating social and communicative competence.

**U4 Scope and Selection of Information**

The scope and selection of the information that has been collected makes it possible to ask pertinent questions about the object of the evaluation. Such scope and selection also takes into account the interests and needs of the parties commissioning the evaluation, as well as other stakeholders.

In planning an evaluation project, it is necessary to specify which information is indispensable to answer the questions posed by or in the evaluation, and to be able to distinguish it from information that is merely interesting or desirable to know but ultimately unnecessary. Attention should be paid to the resources available for data gathering to ensure they match which information is most needed to answer key questions, and to meet the needs of the most important groups the evaluation addresses.

**U5 Transparency of Value Judgments**

The underlying reasoning and points of view upon which an interpretation of evaluation results rests are described in such a manner that the bases for the value judgments are clear.

Interpreting the information gathered, as well as the results, is one of the most important and critical points of an evaluation. Evaluators utilize theoretical models and value orientations in this interpretation process. It is imperative to make the bases for the value judgments that are reached transparent if this interpretive process is to be convincing, comprehensible, and assessable.

**U6 Comprehensiveness and Clarity in Reporting**

Evaluation reports describe the object of evaluation - including its context, goals, questions posed, and procedures used, as well as the findings reached in the evaluation – in such a manner that the most pertinent information is available and readily comprehensible.

Providing reports (or communicating results or conclusions in some other form) in a comprehensive and clear format is one condition for communicating evaluation results in a convincing fashion. The language used should be precise (for example, important terms should be explicitly defined and used consistently) yet readily understandable to the intended readers of the evaluation report. Summarizing important findings in tabular or graphic form can also be helpful. Ideally, the format and type of report(ing) will be planned so as to accord with the optimal perceptual mode of the intended target audience. However, an extensive final report in written form is not necessarily the best format for communicating information to every group or in every situation; more notice may be taken of the conclusions if the information is presented instead in a lecture, at a workshop, or in other, similar formats.

**U7 Timely Reporting**

Significant interim results, as well as final reports, are made available to the intended users such that they can be utilized in a timely manner.

An evaluation loses much of its intended effect if its time frame does not correspond to the existing decision-making time frame of the intended recipients. In many cases, as when evaluations are commissioned by public administrators, considerable advance time must be planned for, since the evaluation is processed internally (involving hearings or producing a complementary report), before a decision can be made. It is also worthwhile to communicate interim reports or preliminary conclusions during the evaluation process itself, particularly so if the data is relevant to actions the intended addressees are planning. It is advantageous to take such feedback loops into account in planning an evaluation, and budget resources for them.

**U8 Evaluation Impact**

The planning, execution, and presentation of an evaluation encourage stakeholders both to follow the evaluation process and to use the evaluation.

Whether the results or recommendations of an evaluation are actually put into practice depends heavily upon whether stakeholders expect beforehand that the evaluation will be of use to them. An important prior condition that helps promote or realize this expectation is to involve the various relevant actors in planning and organizing the evaluation project. It is also helpful if clear, frequent progress reports during the evaluation process are regularly communicated to the stakeholders.

**Feasibility**

**The feasibility standards ensure that an evaluation is conducted in a realistic, well-considered, diplomatic and cost-conscious manner.**

**F1 Practical Procedures**

Evaluation procedures are designed such that the information needed is collected without unduly disrupting the object of the evaluation or the evaluation itself.

The goal in planning and carrying out an evaluation is not to employ procedures that are deemed the best from a scientific point of view. It is just as important to make sure that the methods and procedures chosen are as practicable as possible; neither the object of the evaluation nor those persons who are being surveyed should be unduly burdened. The methods that might yield the most information and seem most promising from a scientific point of view often cannot be used as they are too costly, too time-consuming, or ethically unacceptable in a given situation. What is important is to make clear what the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods are, as well as that they can or cannot contribute, and to do so openly in planning the evaluation. The methods and procedures need to be discussed with those who commission the evaluation, as well as with those individuals and groups to whom the results will be disseminated.

**F2 Anticipating Political Viability**

The various positions of the different interests involved are taken into account in planning and carrying out an evaluation in order to win their cooperation and discourage possible efforts by one or another group to limit evaluation activities or distort or misuse the results.

In order not to be taken by surprise by negative reactions to an evaluation, it is necessary to identify as many of the interested parties as possible. Beyond the immediate circle of those directly involved, this may include persons who can be counted as belonging to the wider environment the object of evaluation is situated in (including those who may offer various products that compete with the object under investigation). Negative reactions may be obviated or at least anticipated if the needs of these various interests are recognized or even, when possible, taken into account. Beyond the openly expressed interests of such groups in the environment, there may also be significant hidden agendas. In considering the explicit and implicit needs and demands various actors place on the evaluation, one should not forget that those who commission the evaluation might also possess them.

**F3 Cost Effectiveness**

Evaluations produce information of a value that justifies the cost of producing them.

An evaluation is cost effective when the expected benefit is as large or larger than the costs. The costs refer to the value of all resources needed, including the time necessary to conduct the evaluation or the costs that are borne by other institutions. The cost is thus the total social and monetary value (full cost) of all the resources needed to carry out the evaluation. The benefits refer to the sum of all values the evaluation brings forth (optimization of effects, possible cost savings, acceptability of a program, etc.).

The cost-benefit relationship should be as optimal as possible in an evaluation. Thus, if there are various options that all promise identical benefits, one should choose that option with the least cost. Correspondingly, where there are various designs available at close to the same cost, one should select the one with the highest anticipated benefits. If in every case costs remain higher than expected benefits, one should not conduct the evaluation.

**Propriety**

**The propriety standards ensure that an evaluation is carried out in a legal and ethical manner and that the welfare of the stakeholders is given due attention.**

**P1 Formal Written Agreement**

The duties of the parties who agree to conduct an evaluation (specifying what, how, by whom, and when what is to be done) are set forth in a written agreement in order to obligate the contracting parties to fulfill all the agreed upon conditions, or if not, to renegotiate the agreement.

The relationship between evaluator and those who commission an evaluation is at the outset ordinarily characterized by mutual respect and trust. This is the best time and environment in which to set out in written form (contract, commission confirmation, etc.) what the most important rules and duties will be for both parties. Formal agreements should establish agreement at least in the following areas: financing, time frame, persons involved, reports to be produced or published, content, methodology, and procedures to be followed. It is particularly important to



specify the exact rights and duties of the participants. If it becomes evident over time that revisions are necessary, it is possible to renegotiate the contractual conditions. A formal, written agreement reduces the likelihood that misunderstandings will arise between the contracting parties and makes it easier to resolve them.

### **P2 Ensuring Individual Rights and Well-Being**

Evaluations are planned and executed in such a manner as to protect and respect the rights and well-being of individuals.

Individuals have personal rights that are secured by law, by ethical practices, and by common sense and decency. The rights and well-being of individuals may not be affected negatively in planning and carrying out an evaluation. This tenet needs to be communicated to all persons involved in an evaluation, and its foreseeable consequences for the evaluation discussed. Those contracting the evaluation should refrain from pushing evaluators to make decisions that might impinge upon an individual's rights or well-being. If an evaluation leads to well-founded conclusions that endanger the well-being of specific individuals, one should carefully consider whether disseminating such results is justified.

### **P3 Respecting Human Dignity**

Evaluations are structured in such a manner that the contacts between participants are marked by mutual respect.

Evaluators should avoid offending the dignity and self-respect of those persons with whom they come in contact in the course of the evaluation. Antagonism toward the evaluation should be avoided by employing appropriate behavior. This is not just a dictate to ensure human dignity is protected, but it also has a practical side. Persons who feel their dignity or self-worth is being disrespected do not just lose creative potential; they also often behave in a manner that limits the evaluation. It is therefore necessary to understand or learn the cultural and social values of those involved in the evaluation, and also consider what significance individuals attach to the evaluation.

### **P4 Complete and Balanced Assessment**

Evaluations are complete and balanced when they assess and present the strengths and weaknesses that exist in the object being evaluated, in a manner that strengths can be built upon and problem areas addressed.

A balanced presentation of strengths and weaknesses intends to provide a complete and fair assessment of the object under evaluation. Even when the primary goal is frequently to identify weak points, this does not absolve an evaluation from its obligation to also find strengths and draw attention to them. It is often possible, in fact, to correct existing weaknesses by using existing strengths. One should keep in mind, however, that correcting the weaknesses may result in impairing the strengths of the object under evaluation. It is thus useful to have the findings reviewed by those external to the evaluation before the final report is written, as they may have different ideas about presenting positive and negative points. In addition, if it is not possible to gather certain data due to time or financial restrictions, these gaps should be clearly indicated. Those commissioning the evaluation should avoid intervening in the evaluation in such a manner as would put a balanced reporting in question.

**P5 Making Findings Available**

The parties who contract to an evaluation ensure that its results are made available to all potentially affected persons, as well as to all others who have a legitimate claim to receive them.

In disseminating the findings, one should pay attention that all those who participated in some manner in the evaluation, or who are affected by it, have access to the reporting. As the group of stakeholders may be very large, reports frequently need to be made public. Those actors most closely involved in the evaluation, namely the evaluator and those who commissioned the evaluation (but sometimes including additional persons), share the responsibility to ensure appropriate access and dissemination. A report should also be written in such a way that it meets the needs of those to whom it is directed. This often requires that an evaluation is adapted so as to appropriately communicate to its intended audience, thus that, for example, a lengthier report will contain summaries or translations, or that a methodology appendix needs to be attached.

**P6 Declaring Conflicts of Interest**

Conflicts of interest are addressed openly and honestly so that they compromise the evaluation process and conclusions as little as possible.

There are many circumstances in which evaluators are faced with conflicts of interest. Evaluators themselves have interests which can impinge upon the results an evaluation reaches, including that they may be more or less dependent upon receiving future contracts to conduct evaluations. Evaluators may also have specific philosophical, theoretical, methodological or political viewpoints, and are themselves parts of organizational and personal networks. Conflicts between the various interests existing in the wider environment can also erupt in the course of an evaluation, with the result that the interpretation, the results, or even the process of evaluating itself can become skewed or distorted. It is generally desirable to avoid conflicts of or between interests, but given the many possibilities for such conflicts to emerge, realistically speaking it is often not possible to entirely avoid them. When they occur, one should find ways of addressing them that will not undermine the evaluation itself.

## Accuracy

**The accuracy standards ensure that an evaluation produces and disseminates valid and usable information.**

### **A1 Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation**

The object of an evaluation is to be clearly and precisely described, documented, and unambiguously identified.

The object of an evaluation, be it a measure, program, or organization, is to be thoroughly investigated. One should pay attention to the fact that this object may take differing forms depending upon time frame or contextual circumstances, and a description should make clear what exactly is being studied. This also enables addressees to draw comparisons with other evaluated objects. A precise investigation of the object under evaluation also makes it possible to discover connections between the object and its effects, or helps identify previously un-remarked side-effects. Particular attention should be paid to the discrepancies that may exist between the original form the object of evaluation was anticipated to take and its actual form in practice or when implemented.

### **A2 Analyzing the Context**

The influences of the context on the object of evaluation are identified.

The context refers to the entirety, in combination, of all the frameworks and conditions that surround the object under evaluation. These can include the institutional embeddedness, the social and political climate, the characteristics of the key stakeholders, the structure of the policy arena, neighboring and competing state or private activities, or the economic framework. These and other contextual factors need to be sufficiently closely investigated so as to appropriately situate the planning, execution, and communication of the evaluation. Such knowledge of setting is necessary if an evaluation is to be realistic about what the existing possibilities or limitations are. Contextual factors often have a decisive influence on the effects of an evaluation object. A well-grounded analysis of the setting also makes it possible to estimate the extent to which evaluation conclusions can be applied to other contexts. In conducting such analysis, one should avoid defining the context too narrowly, but one should also avoid defining it too broadly, as the particular object can then not be sufficiently precisely analysed.

### **A3 Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures**

The goals pursued, questions asked, and procedures used in the evaluation are sufficiently precisely described and documented that they can be identified as well as assessed.

The goals pursued in an evaluation, the questions to be addressed, and the procedures chosen need to be carefully documented in the course of the evaluation. They should also be communicated in clear and comprehensible language when reporting to the addressees of the evaluation; the goal of this Standard is to make the process of evaluation transparent. In describing goals and questions, particular attention needs to be paid to differing or divergent views. Documenting the procedures includes a detailed description of the organization, data collection and processing, analysis, and reporting. One should also pay attention to the fact that the procedures initially chosen may change in the course of the evaluation, thus that the anticipated and actual procedures may not be the same. The reasons for and existence of such divergence need to be explicitly and clearly stated. If goals, questions, and procedures are not declared, it

can protect an evaluation, incorrectly, from justified critique, but it can also mean that inappropriate objections might be raised.

#### **A4 Trustworthy Sources of Information**

The sources of information used in an evaluation are sufficiently precisely described that their adequacy can be assessed.

Describing the sources of information permits stakeholders to come to their own conclusions about the quality of the information coming from these sources. Sources of information for an evaluation include, among others, individuals or groups, documents, audiovisual materials, and statistics. Using differing sources of information permits comparisons to be drawn between the data gleaned from each. The credibility of an evaluation can be put in question if the source of the information is inadequately described or not described at all. Beyond description itself, the information drawn from the sources should also be assessed or qualified, and its trustworthiness should be taken into account in interpreting the conclusions drawn in or from the evaluation.

#### **A5 Valid and Reliable Information**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the interpretation, it is necessary to select, develop, and employ procedures for that given purpose.

To a certain degree, the empirical investigation of a particular object is subject to sources of error. Validity and reliability are designations for two qualities in the investigation that address error, though these qualities can only be estimated in the context of a specific evaluation and with respect to the specific goal set by the empirical investigation.

Validity is a term that asks whether or to what extent a measure accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure. Reliability, in turn, asks about the consistency or stability of the quality measured, whether between measurement instruments, persons, or over time. The validity and reliability of a measure are closely related, and in selecting or assessing data collection instruments, both qualities are to be addressed equally.

#### **A6 Systematic Checking for Errors**

The information collected, analyzed, and presented in an evaluation is systematically checked for errors.

There are many possible sources of error in gathering, assessing, and interpreting information. These can be as simple as typing errors in data entry, and as complex as mistaken interpretations of the data collected. It is vitally necessary for this reason to try to reduce potential sources of error as much as possible in the course of an evaluation. Appropriate methods (plausibility tests, parallel data gathering, communicative validation, etc.) can be used to check the information gathered for possible errors. In reporting the evaluation, such error sources and their consequences need to be openly discussed, for if it is not possible to avoid error, misleading interpretations and conclusions may be drawn. Erroneous assertions, though they may be of less material consequence, can discredit the entire evaluation.

**A7 Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis**

Qualitative and quantitative information are systematically and appropriately analyzed in an evaluation, in a manner that the questions posed by the evaluation can actually be answered.

Conclusions are drawn in evaluations based on the analysis of qualitative as well as quantitative data. The analysis of the information collected should be done in a systematic fashion, and should follow the rules of qualitative and quantitative methodology. It is usually useful, as well as sensible, to draw upon both qualitative and quantitative information in an evaluation. The questions asked, as well as the quality and availability, decisively determine the selection of data and the methodology to analyze it. Factors such as the prior knowledge or preferences of the persons involved should play no role in making such decisions. The methodology choices made should be clearly described, and their consequences critically examined, particularly with reference to the significance of the method(s) and to their limitations.

**A8 Substantiated Conclusions**

The conclusions reached in an evaluation are explicitly substantiated in such a manner that stakeholders can comprehend and judge them.

The conclusions reached in an evaluation must be explicitly justified. They must also be clearly and explicitly described, together with their underlying assumptions and the procedures that were employed to reach them. The scope of the conclusions must also be indicated, and alternate interpretations – and why they were not selected – discussed. In stating the premises on which the conclusions are based, one should avoid using assumptions not shared by the relevant actors. Adhering to this Standard permits those who use the conclusions of the evaluation to judge their significance, and one can thereby also strengthen how convincing these conclusions are.

**A9 Neutral Reporting**

Reporting is free from distortion through personal feelings or preferences on the part of any party to the evaluation; evaluation reports present conclusions in a neutral manner.

Many different perspectives exist in the environment of an evaluation. Stakeholders themselves often hold diverging views of the object of an evaluation. Any given evaluation also runs the danger of being instrumentalized or captured by a particular group or interest, though an evaluation should avoid adopting any one specific point of view. Rather, it should be concerned to fairly represent all relevant interests, and it is important for that reason that an evaluation should take as independent a position as possible. An evaluation should avoid being too closely linked to those who have commissioned it, but should also avoid being too close to those persons who are responsible for the object of the evaluation. The relationship of those responsible for the evaluation to those who have contracted it, and to other relevant groups, should be clarified at the outset of the evaluation process; this clarification of roles also includes agreement about the right to make evaluation reports public.

**A10 Metaevaluation**

The evaluation itself is evaluated on the basis of existing (or other relevant) Standards such that the evaluation is appropriately executed, and so that stakeholders can, in the end, assess the evaluation's strengths and weaknesses.

Failed evaluations can lead to bad decisions. Evaluations can also be subjected to strong, if unjustified, critique. To avoid such situations, the quality of the evaluation itself can be checked by use of a metaevaluation (an evaluation of an evaluation), using the Standards laid out here, for example. Depending on the situation, a metaevaluation can be summative or involve general stocktaking, or it can be formative or structural, and be conducted internally by the evaluation team itself, or externally by those uninvolved in that specific evaluation. As with evaluations themselves, metaevaluations can be either more or less extensive. While an in-depth and comprehensive metaevaluation may be useful only in particular cases, a brief self-evaluation on the part of those who participated in the evaluation should definitely not be omitted from the evaluation process. The relatively small financial resources needed for such a small metaevaluation ought to be planned into the evaluation from the outset.

## **ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL**

### **The SEVAL Standards: A Functional Overview**

The following overview indicates which Standards are most relevant for various evaluation activities:

#### **Decision to Conduct an Evaluation**

- U1** Identifying Stakeholders
- U2** Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation
- U3** Credibility
- U8** Evaluation Impact
- F2** Anticipating Political Viability
- F3** Cost Effectiveness
- P1** Formal Written Agreement
- K6** Declaring Conflicts of Interest
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A2** Analyzing the Context
- A10** Metaevaluation

#### **Defining the Evaluation**

- U1** Identifying Stakeholders
- U2** Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A2** Analyzing the Context
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A10** Metaevaluation

#### **Planning the Evaluation**

- U1** Identifying Stakeholders
- U2** Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation
- U4** Scope and Selection of Information
- U5** Transparency of Value Judgments
- F1** Practical Procedures
- P1** Formal Written Agreement
- P4** Complete and Balanced Assessment
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A4** Trustworthy Sources of Information
- A5** Valid and Reliable Information
- A7** Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis
- A8** Substantiated Conclusions
- A9** Neutral Reporting
- A10** Metaevaluation

**Collecting the Information**

- U3** Credibility
- U4** Scope and Selection of Information
- U5** Transparency of Value Judgments
- F1** Practical Procedures
- F2** Anticipating Political Viability
- P1** Formal Written Agreement
- P2** Ensuring Individual Rights and Well-Being
- P3** Respecting Human Dignity
- P4** Complete and Balanced Assessment
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A2** Analyzing the Context
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A4** Trustworthy Sources of Information
- A5** Valid and Reliable Information
- A6** Systematic Checking for Errors
- A10** Metaevaluation

**Analyzing the Information**

- U5** Transparency of Value Judgments
- F1** Practical Procedures
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A2** Analyzing the Context
- A7** Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis
- A8** Substantiated Conclusions
- A10** Metaevaluation

**Evaluation Reporting**

- U1** Identifying Stakeholders
- U4** Scope and Selection of Information
- U5** Transparency of Value Judgments
- U6** Comprehensiveness and Clarity in Reporting
- U7** Timely Reporting
- U8** Evaluation Impact
- P2** Ensuring Individual Rights and Well-Being
- P4** Complete and Balanced Assessment
- P5** Making Findings Available
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A2** Analyzing the Context
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A4** Trustworthy Sources of Information
- A8** Substantiated Conclusions
- A9** Neutral Reporting
- A10** Metaevaluation



**Evaluation Budgeting**

- U2** Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation
- U4** Scope and Selection of Information
- F3** Cost Effectiveness
- P1** Formal Written Agreement
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A10** Metaevaluation

**Concluding an Evaluation Contract**

- U1** Identifying Stakeholders
- U2** Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation
- U3** Credibility
- U4** Scope and Selection of Information
- U7** Timely Reporting
- F2** Anticipating Political Viability
- P1** Formal Written Agreement
- P2** Ensuring Individual Rights and Well-Being
- P5** Making Findings Available
- K6** Declaring Conflicts of Interest
- A1** Precise Description of the Object of Evaluation
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A10** Metaevaluation

**Managing the Evaluation**

- U1** Identifying Stakeholders
- U2** Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation
- U3** Credibility
- U7** Timely Reporting
- F2** Anticipating Political Viability
- F3** Cost Effectiveness
- P1** Formal Written Agreement
- P2** Ensuring Individual Rights and Well-Being
- P3** Respecting Human Dignity
- K6** Declaring Conflicts of Interest
- A3** Precise Description of Goals, Questions, and Procedures
- A6** Systematic Checking for Errors
- A10** Metaevaluation

**Personnel and Evaluation**

- U3** Credibility
- F2** Anticipating Political Viability
- K6** Declaring Conflicts of Interest
- A9** Neutral Reporting
- A10** Metaevaluation

## Procedures Used in Formulating the SEVAL Standards

The SEVAL Standards were initially derived from the German translation (Joint Committee 2000) of the Program Evaluation Standards that the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (Joint Committee 1994) had codified in the US. Members of the SEVAL Evaluation Standards working group were surveyed about this initial version, and based on their responses, a subcommittee of the working group was formed to engage in a adaptation. The subcommittee's first revision of the Standards was then discussed in the working group, and their responses led to a second revision. This second revision was then presented for discussion at a conference on "Ensuring Quality in Evaluation" held in Berne (26 May 2000), with about eighty participants. The comments from this conference discussion were subsequently integrated into a third revision undertaken by the subcommittee and the working group. The current text of the SEVAL Standards is the product of this iterative process.

The following changes and revisions were undertaken: the term "program" (or "program evaluation") was replaced by the term "object of the evaluation" (or "evaluation"). This change had no effect on the meaning, as the term "program" is understood in a broad sense in the original American version. To simplify the language, "should" formulations were changed to "is" or "are" formulations. Beyond a number of other general revisions in language employed, the following specific changes should be noted (abbreviations are from the German translation in Joint Committee 2000):

- consolidation of the Standards G5<sup>1</sup> and G6, and of the Standards G8 and G9
- revisions or reformulations of the N7, D1, D3, K3, K4, K6, K7, G2, G7, G10, and G12 Standards
- complete omission (without replacement) of the G1 and K8 Standards
- addition of a new Standard U2 "Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation"

These individual changes are as follows:

### **Consolidated Standards:**

The original G5 and G6 Standards separately addressed validity and reliability, two criteria for the quality of a measure that are often found in social science work. However, as these are interdependent aspects, assessing them separately makes little sense (see Widmer 1996: 296), so the two were consolidated into a single Standard.

As a rule, evaluations should rely on both quantitative and qualitative data; the original G8 (quantitative) and G9 (qualitative) Standards were consolidated into a single Standard.

### **Revised or reformulated Standards:**

*N7 Wirkung der Evaluation [Evaluation Impact] = U8 Evaluation Impact* : An alternate formulation was chosen to simplify the language but no changes were made to the content.

*D1 Praktische Verfahren [Practical Procedures] = F1 Practical Procedures*: Here, too, revision was purely a matter of simplifying the language.

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<sup>1</sup> The letter G, as well as N, D, and K refer henceforth to the acronyms used for the Standards in the German version (N for 'Nützlichkeit' (Utility), D for 'Durchführbarkeit' (Feasibility), K for 'Korrektheit' (Propriety), and G for 'Genauigkeit' (Accuracy); Joint Committee 2000)

*D3 Kostenwirksamkeit [Cost Effectiveness] = F3 Cost Effectiveness:* The demand that the evaluation be efficient was omitted as it was already stated previously in the same Standard.

*K3 Schutz individueller Menschenrechte [Rights of Human Subjects] = P2 Ensuring Individual Rights and Well-Being:* The original title of this Standard ("the protection of individual human rights") did not entirely correspond to the content, as this Standard goes beyond only human rights.

*K4 Human gestaltete Interaktion [Human Interaction] = P3 Respecting Human Dignity:* This Standard was reformulated because the original stated that it was only evaluators who should "respect human dignity and worth"; such a one-sided standard was not convincing.

*K6 Offenlegung der Ergebnisse [Disclosure of Findings] = P5 Making Findings Available:* The original clause "along with pertinent limitations" was omitted as it was unclear which limitations were meant, and because this was already the subject of other Standards (see U4, U5, P4, and A4).

*K7 Deklaration von Interessenkonflikten [Conflict of Interest] = P6 Declaring Conflicts of Interest:* As it not possible to completely avoid conflicts of interests that interfere with an evaluation, the absolute formulation "do not comprise" was made milder with the formulation "compromise as little as possible".

*G2 Kontextanalyse [Context Analysis] = A2 Analyzing the Context:* This Standard was formulated more simply, but no content changes were made.

*G7 Systematische Informationsüberprüfung [Systematic Information] = A6 Systematic Checking for Errors:* The final clause "and any errors found should be corrected" was omitted, as the explicit direction to undertake corrections was regarded as unnecessary.

*G10 Begründete Schlussfolgerungen [Justified Conclusions] = A8 Substantiated Conclusions:* A few words were added to this Standard for clarity, and to emphasize the need to be able to comprehend the conclusions as this is an important precondition for being able to assess or judge them.

*G12 Meta-Evaluation [Metaevaluation] = A10 Metaevaluation:* This Standard was lightly reformulated: the technical terms "formative" and "summative" were dropped from the original for better understanding, and the formulation "thoroughly scrutinize" was replaced with "assess", in order that a metaevaluation more appropriate to smaller evaluation projects can be carried out.

### **Completely omitted Standards:**

#### **K1 Service Orientation**

Evaluations should be designed to assist organizations to address and effectively serve the needs of the full range of targeted participants.

#### *Reasons for Omission:*

One of the basic principles for the Standards is that they should be suited to as many potential applications as possible. However, not all objects of evaluation are organizations that have a service orientation (as for example in private industry evaluations). It also does not seem entirely clear at the outset that serving the needs of all target partici-

pants is necessarily sensible. There may be cases where it is important to do the exact opposite, namely concentrate on a specific segment.

### **K8 Fiscal Responsibility**

The evaluator's allocation and expenditure of resources should reflect sound accountability procedures and otherwise be prudent and ethically responsible, so that expenditures are accounted for and appropriate.

#### *Reasons for Omission:*

- The Standard mixes a variety of different concerns, even though they partly address connected concerns (sound accountability, ethically responsible allocation of resources, accounted for expenditures, "otherwise prudent" allocation and expenditure of resources)
- The F3 Standard already addresses the key concern of this K8 Standard.
- From the moment the contract to conduct the evaluation is signed, the relationship between evaluator and those letting out the contract is a normal business relationship regulated in the contract (and by the laws governing contracts). Of much greater importance is (or would be) what takes place before the contract is signed (e.g., the tendering practices of the public sector and in private organizations). The interests of those commissioning evaluations would be better protected through appropriate formulations in the regulations that govern tenders or bids.
- Many of the contracts in the service sector are in the form of lump sum payments based on services rendered. The moment a contract is signed, no further claims can be made to examine the accounting; from that perspective the Standard is naïve and unrealistic.
- The Standard also violates the principle of symmetry, because in no other Standard is the party commissioning the evaluation obligated to make resources available in a manner that is "ethically responsible" or to ensure that "expenditures are accounted for and appropriate".

#### *Added new Standard:*

### **U2 Clarifying the Objectives of the Evaluation**

All who contribute to or are involved in an evaluation will ensure that the objectives of the evaluation are clear to all stakeholders.

This Standard was newly included in the SEVAL Standards, as the working group was of the opinion that a major gap existed in the Joint Committee Standards. True, the objectives or goals of the evaluation were either implicitly or explicitly (as in U1 or A3) noted in other Standards, but because of the great significance the working group accorded to clarifying the objectives or goals of an evaluation, they felt it justified to introduce an explicit, separate Standard to draw attention to this aspect.

## Transformation Table for the Standards

The following correspondence between the Program Evaluation Standards (German version in Joint Committee 2000) [JC] and the SEVAL Standards [SEVAL] alphanumeric designations result from the changes just noted:

JC	SEVAL	JC	SEVAL	JC	SEVAL	JC	SEVAL
N1	U1	D1	F1	K6	P5	G7	A6
na	U2	D2	F2	K7	K6	G8/G9	A7
N2	U3	D3	F3	K8	omitted	G10	A8
N3	U4	K1	omitted	G1	A1	G11	A9
N4	U5	K2	P1	G2	A2	G12	A10
N5	U6	K3	P2	G3	A3		
N6	U7	K4	P3	G4	A4		
N7	U8	K5	P4	G5/G6	A5		

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