

AusGuideline

General

6.2 Planning and managing in-country missions

Associated General Guidance

AusGuideline 6.1 *Preparing terms of reference*

AusGuideline 6.3 *Managing risk*

AusGuideline 6.4 *Promoting practical sustainability*

AusGuideline 6.5 *Activity quality standards*

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1 Purpose

In-country studies are undertaken by AusAID for a variety of purposes. These include activity identification, pre-feasibility, feasibility, appraisal, review and ex-post evaluation. The main elements of managing these missions are very similar. This guideline provides advice mainly for identification missions and the various forms of design missions, but may be applicable to other types of in-country missions.

The presence of a field mission during activity preparation often raises expectations that Australian assistance will be forthcoming, irrespective of any caveats placed on the mission's work. The team needs to try to contain such expectations when planning and implementing field missions.

2 Responsibilities

Overall responsibility for in-country study missions rests with the Activity Manager. The Activity Manager may also attend for part, or all, of the mission.

For any field studies, the Activity Manager needs to be able to

- draw upon people from different parts of AusAID in preparing the mission
- ensure that Post personnel and the partner government are able to participate fully
- assemble a study team - this includes engaging consultant specialists as required
- facilitate the team in its field activities (through the Post), and
- facilitate document finalisation upon the team's return.

The Activity Manager should draw on the services and expertise of other parts of AusAID and consultants in preparing for the mission as part of a team based approach. These may include

- Contract Services Group (CSG) in regard to contracting issues for the study, or for contracting issues relating to the activity
- sectoral advisers in regard to sectoral and cross-cutting issues. Advisers may be study team leaders or members and may undertake appraisal duties (but an individual may not undertake both)

- members of the Office of Review and Evaluation, in regard to activity quality issues, sustainability and risk assessment techniques and lessons learnt from evaluation of similar activities
- other AusAID Canberra personnel, as appropriate, including members of teams formed to deal with specific activities, programs or issues, and
- responsible personnel at the Post regarding arrangements for the mission, liaison with the partner government and other stakeholders, and feedback on the outcomes of the mission.

3 Key steps

The initial task is to determine that an in-country mission is warranted – this can be based on the size and importance of the activity, the stage of its preparation, the need for engagement with the partner government, partner agencies and intended beneficiaries and the need for additional information not accessible by other means.

There are four main steps when undertaking field study missions

1. developing the terms of reference (TOR)
2. selecting and preparing the study team
3. conducting the study, and
4. preparing the study document.

The tasks required during each of these main steps are described below. Finalising the study document and any steps following on from it will depend on the nature of the study, and are not discussed in this guideline. For finalising study reports at the identification or preparation stage, refer to AusGuide Part 3A *Identification and assessment of initiatives*, Part 3B *Preparing activity designs*, or Part 3C *Appraisal and approval*. If the study is for an implementation review, such as a mid-term review, refer to AusGuideline 4.6 *Undertaking an implementation review*.

3.1 Developing the TOR

3.1.1 Purpose

The TOR have two functions. Firstly, they form the guidelines for the mission against which all team members will undertake their analyses and make their report. Secondly, and for contracting purposes, they form the basis against which bids can be placed, contracts

negotiated and payments made. For details on formulating TOR, refer to AusGuideline 6.1 *Preparing terms of reference*.

3.1.2 Content

It is important that the study team be provided with a clear background to the activity and a clear understanding of the issues that AusAID requires it to investigate. The Activity Manager needs to ensure that this information is collected for inclusion in the TOR for the study.

Important issues for the study should include consideration of the development constraints which the activity aims to address, as well as any relevant institutional, financial, economic, political, sectoral or other relevant design issues (such as the environment and gender). Attention should be drawn to relevant AusAID policies and operational guidelines.

The TOR should also clearly state the output of the mission. Specifically they should describe the required study report, including any format to be followed, and the timing of its submission to AusAID.

3.1.3 Supporting material

Sources of information relevant to the study may include

- AusAID's Knowledge Warehouse (AKWa)
- relevant AusAID policies and guidelines and country strategy papers
- AusAID reports and publications on quality issues, such as Quality Assurance Group reviews
- AusGuide for information on activity identification and design, including suggested report formats study teams may be asked to follow
- previous evaluations of similar activities or of activities in the same geographical area
- documents from previous similar activities, including those of other donors, and
- strategy and policy materials from the partner government

The Activity Manager should use this information when preparing the TOR and should make relevant documents available to the study team. Alternatively, the Activity Manager can prepare, or commission, a paper discussing issues at greater depth, if this is felt useful, or can use the peer group approach to assist in collating issues.

3.1.4 Seeking input

The first draft of the TOR is usually sent to the Post and to appropriate advisers for comment. The Post will ensure that the partner government is consulted for comment. It may also be appropriate to use a peer group to discuss issues and to finalise the TOR. Peer groups can be

set up from the start to provide input to TORs, review the draft documentation and suggest next steps. Peer groups can be very useful for complex or potentially controversial or sensitive activities.

3.1.5 Approval

Once the TOR have been finalised they require approval by the Country Program Manager and the Country Director. Once this has been obtained, the Activity Manager will seek a suitable study team in consultation with CSG.

3.2 Selecting and preparing the study team

3.2.1 Tendering and contracting

Suitable contracting strategies for the mission team will vary with the size and scope of the mission. Refer to CSG for advice.

Regardless of the contracting strategy, the Activity manager and CSG are responsible for preparing contract documentation before selection takes place. The Activity Manager usually prepares the scope of services, based on the TOR, and CSG prepares the rest of the contract and any associated tendering documents (or assists the Activity Manager to use existing contracting and tendering formats). This is done before selection so that contractors, whether responding to a tender or approached directly, know exactly the intended work and method of payment.

3.2.2 Preparing for the study

The Activity Manager will liaise with the Post and the mission team leader on logistical arrangements for the mission. This may include preparing supporting letters to obtain visas and other entry documents.

The Post will usually make initial appointments for meetings that the team needs to conduct on arrival in country. It will also be involved in the arrangements for wrap-up meetings prior to departure. The Post may also assist with in-country logistics like hotel and transport bookings. However, if the conduct of the study has been contracted out, accommodation and transport will usually be organised by the contractor. In general terms, team logistics are considered to be the responsibility of the team once initial meetings have been completed.

3.2.3 Timing

The length of time required in-country for a study will vary with the scope of work required, and the size and locations of the activities undergoing preparation. The length of time required needs to be considered in preparing the TOR.

In determining a realistic period of time and a workable sequence of activities for the study, the Activity Manager should take into account

- the number of different locations that the team or individuals in the team will have to visit
- the number of institutions involved in the activity and the levels of government and administration with which the team has to deal (e.g. national, provincial, district)
- the remoteness of locations and the likely availability of transport. Assignments requiring extensive community consultation in remote areas will require significantly more time
- the time required to allow a sufficiently participatory approach. Experience suggests that more time is often needed to fully involve stakeholders or beneficiaries in the activity preparation process. This issue should have been addressed when formulating the activity preparation path
- the likely range of issues that need exploring
- the likely time requirements for writing reports, and the expected size of reports, number of essential annexes etc, and
- the extent to which extensive preliminary or wrap-up activities or meetings are required.

3.2.4 Team briefing

A major task for the Activity Manager is the pre-mission briefing for the team in Australia. Usually this involves the team assembling for the briefing in AusAID in Canberra. This facilitates access to AusAID personnel and resources relevant to the mission. It is also possible for a briefing to be arranged in another location. The Activity Manager should ensure the team has timely access to all relevant activity and policy documents. As appropriate, copies should be made available for the team to take with them on the mission.

As the briefing is sometimes the first occasion when a team meets, it is also important to allow them time to discuss the mission amongst themselves. Additional time may also be provided for reading and researching materials in preparation for the mission. Possible agenda items for pre-departure briefing are given below. The Activity Manager may need to vary this to suit the requirements or particular missions.

- purpose of the study
- history and other background to the activity, including any official proposal and earlier preparation steps

- AusAID related activities and those of other donors
- Australian policies and the position of the activity in the country program and strategy
- Australian and partner government policies that specifically impinge on the activity, such as poverty reduction, environment, gender, population etc
- information on the country and sector that is of relevance to the study
- the TOR for the study
- discussion of the activity and its present stage of preparation, using the logical framework if there is one available (from a prefeasibility study for instance)
- the approach to the study and the work program as already established
- contracting issues (especially for a design mission), and
- study reporting requirements.

3.2.5 Preparation by Post for in-coming missions

When preparing for in-country missions the Post, in consultation with either the Activity Manager and/or the partner government aid coordination agency, should

- allocate adequate time and resources to supporting the study mission, including accompanying the study team if appropriate
- confirm the itinerary
 - help prepare the detailed itinerary for in-country work
 - ensure that the study-team's scope of work and itinerary is made available to the partner government aid coordination agency, and, if appropriate, directly to lead implementing agencies
 - confirm acceptability of the study team's scope of work and itinerary with the partner government aid coordination agency, and
 - make introductory appointments with key local stakeholders, at least for the first few days of the mission
- manage internal travel and accommodation
 - help arrange internal travel approvals, if required, and
 - advise on local accommodation and travel issues and, if appropriate, facilitate bookings
- brief the team on any current security issues associated with the study team's planned field work
- collate all relevant documents held by the Post, or available from local agencies, that will help the study team in their work, and
- keep all relevant parties informed of any changes required to the itinerary as a result of unforeseen events.

3.3 Conducting the study in-country

There are a number of tasks common to most field studies, as suggested below. (All tasks required of the team should be built into the TOR).

3.3.1 Collecting information

- discussion/briefing with AusAID and other personnel at the Embassy/High Commission, including the Head of Mission if the task is complex or sensitive
- discussion with the partner government aid coordination agency, including investigation of aid policy issues and priorities and counterpart budget allocation issues
- discussion with line agencies at the national level to obtain information on current national/sectoral policies, programs and budget, and to discuss technical details as required and
- field visits as required to consult with local authorities, obtain views of immediate beneficiaries, inspect sites and gather detailed data.

3.3.2 Analysing and reporting results

- analysis, report writing and ongoing discussion with partner government as the mission proceeds
- preparation of preliminary findings and presentation to local officials, technical staff and beneficiaries as appropriate
- discussion with AusAID personnel
- preparation of an aide-memoire, and
- final wrap up meeting with aid coordination agency and national technical agencies as required and discussion/agreement on the aide-memoire.

3.3.3 In-country debriefing and the aide memoire

Following completion of the in-country phase of the study, the team presents its findings in briefing sessions involving the relevant partner government agencies and the AusAID Post.

If the team's preliminary draft report is in a form suitable for distribution, the team leader makes it available to the relevant partner government agencies. The decision to do this will be made by the Post in consultation with the Activity Manager if required. It should be noted that a half-drafted document may be misleading. A document may also be misleading when issues are raised that need fuller consideration by AusAID.

More usually, the team will present an aide memoire to the partner government. The aide memoire outlines the purpose and principal findings of the mission, the method used and the

composition of the team. It should also include a disclaimer indicating that the findings are those of the team and do not necessarily reflect the views of AusAID or the partner government.

AusAID personnel or the team leader should stress to all, including counterpart team members, that AusAID's decision on how to proceed with the activity will depend on its appraisal of the final study report.

3.4 Preparing the study document

The content and structure of the study document will vary according to the type of study being undertaken. Study teams should draw upon AusGuideline 3.4 *Undertaking a prefeasibility study* and 3.5 *Undertaking a feasibility and design study*. These are guidelines rather than a prescription for the documents and may be varied if necessary or desirable. As noted in section 3.1.2, the Activity Manager should have considered reporting requirements and formats in preparing the TOR.