



## Completing a Quality at Implementation Report

### Guideline

#### Contents:

- Quality Reporting System
  - Why do a Quality at Implementation report?
  - When to do a Quality at Implementation report
- Ownership and Contestability
  - Sharing information with partners
- Completing the Quality at Implementation Report
  - Quality Ratings
  - Entering the information
    1. Key Results
    2. Summary of Objectives
    3. Implementation Progress
    4. Achievement of Objectives
    5. Monitoring & Evaluation
    6. Sustainability
    7. Gender Equality and Cross-Cutting Issues
    8. Risk Management
    9. Current issues

### Quality Reporting System

AusAID's Quality Reporting System provides procedures to track the quality of an activity<sup>1</sup> at entry, implementation and completion. The following five **Aid Quality Principles** are to be used as a guide to ask the necessary questions at all stages of quality reporting; that is entry, implementation and at completion. All aid activities are expected to:

1. Achieve clearly stated objectives that contribute to higher level objectives in the program strategy
2. Effectively measure progress towards meeting objectives
3. Continually manage risks
4. Appropriately address sustainability, with due account of partner government systems, stakeholder ownership and phase out
5. Be based on sound technical analysis and continuous learning

As part of this system, a **Quality at Implementation Report** is required for all monitored aid activities, at regular intervals over the life of the activity. At the beginning, the initial Quality at Implementation report for an activity should take account of the issues identified in the Quality at Entry report. As the activity nears completion, the self-rated assessments in the last few Quality at Implementation reports will be compared

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<sup>1</sup> Note that aid activities may be described in AidWorks as either initiatives, or activities.

with the independent ratings provided by the Quality at Completion assessment, which forms part of the Independent Completion Report.

### ***Why do a Quality at Implementation report?***

The Quality at Implementation report provides managers and corporate areas with information on the quality of activity implementation, and provides an opportunity for activity managers to periodically reflect on the key issues relating to quality. The process of developing and updating a Quality at Implementation report helps activity managers understand key performance issues and communicate these to AusAID managers and implementing partners. The report is a primary information source for a variety of reporting and briefing needs, and for corporate performance reporting such as Annual Program Performance Reports, Annual Sector Performance Reports, and the Annual Review of Development Effectiveness.

### ***When to do a Quality at Implementation report***

Quality at Implementation Reports are required for all substantive, monitored aid activities, across all aid modalities, eg, cofinancing, sector-wide and program approaches, global programs and bilateral activities, where:

- a. the expected Australian Government funding over the entire life of the activity is \$3 million or greater, *or*
- b. the value is less than \$3 million, but significant to country or corporate strategies or key relationships with other development partners including whole of government partners.

The first Quality at Implementation report should be prepared approximately six months after activity approval, to ensure early attention to quality issues.

Subsequent Quality at Implementation Reports should be completed at least once a year and not later than 30 April, or earlier if required to fit in with the Annual Program Performance Review. Alternatively, preparation of new QAI reports could be timed to fit in with other key events, such as independent reviews, meetings with the program governing body, annual plan reviews, or major monitoring reports. Activity managers are encouraged to prepare more frequent updates as needed to reflect the findings of important reviews, significant changes in performance, or closer monitoring undertaken for activities with unsatisfactory ratings or significant risks.

## **Ownership and Contestability**

All ratings are entered by the activity manager and approved by the line manager. Where possible, the draft report should be discussed with colleagues and country program managers to ensure robust ratings and clear information. The ratings will be “owned” by the program team, but can be contested by comments from independent reviews, thematic groups and other AusAID staff outside the program area. Independent reviews can sometimes be used to provide independent ratings. AusAID’s thematic networks provide a useful source of internal input from other program areas dealing with similar issues. Input from others can be sought by either asking them to comment on your QAI report, or to provide their own ratings using this guidance.

### ***Sharing information with partners***

Program areas should share the substance of these reports with implementing partners, contractors and other stakeholders. For example, at a minimum, describe our four ratings in words, such as “the activity is only marginally achieving its objectives, and monitoring and evaluation is less than satisfactory”. It may also help to describe the types of actions that are needed to improve them if required. This helps to promote better partnerships and a common understanding of achievements and outcomes, and the mechanisms available to achieve these. However the rating is AusAID’s, and may not necessarily be agreed with partners.

When you receive reports from implementing partners, this can be a good opportunity to consider how well these reports help AusAID complete a QAI assessment. Any gaps between reported information and our quality assessment needs can provide a good opportunity for discussion with partners.

The Quality at Implementation Report assesses the overall development effectiveness of an activity, and not the contractual performance of a specific contract or agreement. There are often cases where development outcomes are weak despite good contract performance, and conversely where outcomes are strong despite significant contractual problems. Sharing the substance of the report with contractors should provide an opportunity to discuss outcomes separately from contract performance.

## Completing the Quality at Implementation Report

Quality at Implementation Reports should provide a concise and coherent story of activity progress, achievements and challenges.

- **All answers should be brief.** Long answers detract from the clarity and readability of the report. There is a 300 word limit for each section of the report in AidWorks, but shorter text is preferred.
- A balanced assessment which highlights both strengths and weaknesses is generally more convincing to readers, and focuses discussion on the relative importance of these factors rather than the credibility of the overall assessment.
- It is also useful to reference evidence and sources to support judgements.
- For activities with a number of components, the assessment is made for the activity as a whole, against its overall objectives. The assessment may make reference to components which are performing satisfactorily and those that are not.

### Quality Ratings

For the sections of the QAI report on *Implementation Progress*, *Achieving Objectives*, *Monitoring & Evaluation*, and *Sustainability*, quality ratings are required. Use the following rating scale:

Satisfactory		Less than satisfactory	
6	Very high quality; needs ongoing management and monitoring only	3	Less than adequate quality; needs work to improve in core areas
5	Good quality; needs minor work to improve in some areas	2	Poor quality; needs major work to improve
4	Adequate quality; needs some work to improve	1	Very poor quality; needs major overhaul

### Actions needed to improve ratings

Where the rating is less than 5, you should provide information on how the rating will be improved.

- Briefly identify actions needed to raise the rating to the next level, and eventually to a fully satisfactory rating of 5 or better.
- Identify specific actions planned or suggested.

Note that the second point is not always the same as the first. In some cases you may need to indicate in the text that short-term agreed steps are not necessarily sufficient to raise the rating to fully satisfactory, and there may be a need to look for more substantial changes in the medium term, including by other partners, to realize a higher rating.

Actions to improve should be proactive and realistic solutions. Resources such as Thematic Groups and networks should be used by activity managers for information and advice about how the activity can achieve objectives and perform satisfactorily.

### Entering the information

The first five criteria of the report really tell the story about the quality of the implementation. The following outline may help clarify what you need to focus on in each section:

1. **Key Results:** highlight the achievements
2. **Objectives Summary:** what are we trying to achieve? (the basis for judging success)
3. **Implementation Progress:** did we do what we said, on time and within budget?
4. **Achieving Objectives:** are we achieving (or likely to achieve) the outcomes we expected?
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** how good is the evidence to support our judgements?

### 1. Key Results

This information should tell the story of the main achievements of the aid activity implementation to date, and especially in the past year. This is useful for a range of briefing and reporting requirements, and should

provide the primary source of information that can be summarised for Annual Program Performance Reports and Annual Sector Performance Reports.

- Include both outputs (eg, schools built, curriculum developed) and outcomes (eg, changes in educational achievement and service delivery).
- A common weakness is too much focus on outputs, and too little on outcomes. Even at early stages of implementation, readers will expect evidence that attention is clearly aimed at achieving development objectives, and not just delivering outputs.
- Include institutional outcomes, such as changes in behaviours and institutional performance.
- Include results which were not planned for, if they demonstrate important achievements. For example replication of activity results into government and other programs can be an important sign of development impact. Also note any negative unplanned effects.
- Be selective, highlighting key achievements which tell a story, rather than long lists.
- Note that the reader is likely to compare these key results with the elapsed implementation time and the amount of money spent on the activity to date.
- Where relevant, make the link between activity results and higher-level country or thematic strategy performance indicators.

## 2. Summary of Objectives

Briefly (in not more than eight lines) summarize the stated objectives.

- An objective is defined as “a specific statement setting out what an activity is expected to achieve by a given time”, and provides the primary basis for judging the success of the activity.
- It is good management practice to limit the number of objectives to ensure focus on the priority outcomes to be achieved.
- For many AusAID activities this information is listed under the “Purpose” section of the activity Design Document or in the monitoring and evaluation framework.
- In some cases the objectives may not be clearly stated or may not seem to provide a realistic basis against which we can assess achieving objectives. In these cases the assessment may need to propose a simple objective statement, based on best available information about the intent of the activity, in order to provide a basis against which this assessment is made. The “Actions Needed to Improve” column should note the need for a formal process to review the objectives (see below).
- For partnership agreements, where the objectives and arrangements are not primarily determined by AusAID, it may be appropriate to identify both the overall objective of the program, and AusAID’s specific objectives in supporting the program.

**NOTE:** Senior program management approval should be sought when an “Action Needed to Improve” involves substantive changes to Objectives. This would typically involve peer review of a short document which sets out the rationale, proposed changes and any implications – eg, need for contract variations or changes to monitoring and evaluation arrangements. Approved changes should then be recorded in the activity documents.

## 3. Implementation Progress

Explain the rating based on whether the specific actions needed to produce the outcomes are on schedule, relative to what was expected at design.

- Have the funds been spent on schedule, for the intended purposes?
- Depending on the stage of implementation, this may also take account of contracting, staffing, policy decisions, meetings, and setting up of institutional arrangements necessary for implementation.
- If implementation plans were substantially revised after early delays, and implementation is now on track relative to a new plan, the text should note this.
- For designs which rely substantially on annual plans, the assessment may need to consider both the original intent and the annual detailed program.

#### 4. Achievement of Objectives

Explain the rating based on the objectives identified above, to answer the question: *Is the initiative achieving the outcomes expected at this stage, and likely to achieve its intended outcomes?*

- The response should not describe the outcomes again, but briefly explain whether targets are being met, or are likely to be met.
- Provide evidence to support this assessment, drawing where possible on activity performance framework & indicators (see below).
- Where formal indicators are not sufficient to support this assessment, other sources of information may include findings of independent reviews, and subjective assessments of key objectives.

#### 5. Monitoring & Evaluation

Briefly explain the rating of monitoring & evaluation for this activity.

- Were indicators able to be used as evidence to support the "Achieving objectives" rating?
- Are the objectives clearly defined and measurable?
- Are indicators sufficiently quantifiable, with baseline data and current values? (Note qualitative information is also important.)
- Do they capture information about the key outcomes and outputs of the activity?
- Are we measuring the right things? Do we need proxy indicators?
- Do we need more quantifiable milestones?
- Where appropriate, are we working through and strengthening partner government information systems?
- Is adequate information being collected to facilitate the reporting at completion?

#### 6. Sustainability

Even at early stages of implementation, this section should take note of whether arrangements and ownership are in place to ensure sustainability after completion.

- Sustainability is defined as the continuation of the benefits or outcomes of an activity after external support is removed.
- This is closely linked to the depth of institutional ownership of the activity, and the capacity and commitment of governments to provide ongoing funding where required.
- It is clear that we understand the key factors promoting or inhibiting sustainability and we have an appropriate strategy in place to promote sustainability.
- In more fragile states dependant on external funds, it may be useful to separately consider financial sustainability and the depth of ownership and participation by local institutions and individuals, before providing an overall rating for this category.

In exceptional cases where an activity is designed to stabilize a deteriorating situation or provide emergency assistance, it may not be appropriate to rate Sustainability. In these circumstances a rating of "1" should be entered and the text should indicate why it was Not Rated. However these cases should be rare, and apply only for a short period. Stabilization activities usually transition quickly towards capacity building, and even emergency interventions can have important sustainability issues, such as strengthening local emergency response capacity or helping disaster-affected communities rebuild services and economic activity.

#### 7. Gender Equality and Cross-Cutting Issues

Note specific outputs, outcomes or activities which contribute significantly to AusAID's policy commitments on gender equality, partnerships, anti-corruption, as well as cross-cutting thematic issues such as HIV/AIDS, use of government systems or other important White Paper commitments.

- This section should provide meaningful information, across the country and thematic programs, of plans, monitoring and results which show progress towards these aid policy commitments.

- It is therefore important that they provide specific details rather than generalities, and where possible track progress towards defined objectives in these areas.
- On gender, for example, the text should identify gender equality priorities and targets for the activity, note relevant outputs and how they have contributed to gender equality results. Opportunities for promoting gender equality could be mentioned where relevant.
- On partnerships, discuss the quality and progress of specific partnerships that contribute to achieving activity objectives.

## **8. Risk Management**

This section should identify significant risks which management might not otherwise be aware of, especially reputational risks such as environment, social, corruption or political concerns related to the initiative.

- It should not be used as the primary mechanism to update initiative risk matrices, but should highlight current issues which need higher-level management attention, and inform Post Risk Assessments and Portfolio Management Plans.
- This section would not usually cover country-level risks unless they directly influence the ability to achieve activity outcomes.