

September 2023

This publication was produced by the USAID Center for Education in the Bureau for Development, Democracy and Innovation (DDI) for use by contractors conducting research or evaluations for education programs.

[Research/Evaluation] Study design template for education programs

# TITLE

subtitle Optional (but do not use name of implementing partner or acronyms)

MONTH DAY, YEAR

PROJECT NUMBER (IF ONE EXISTS); EVALUATION MECHANISM NUMBER (If applicable):

DEC CATALOGUE NUMBER IF REQUESTED IN ADVANCE OF PUBLICATION

ANY SHORT OVERARCHING MESSAGE

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# Acronyms

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ADS | Automated Directives System |
| ASQ Tool | Assessment of Study Quality Tool |
| DEC | Development Experience Clearinghouse |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| OU | Operating Unit |
| SOW | Statement of Work  |
| USAID | U.S. Agency for International Development |

# Introduction

This template is an optional tool to help improve consistency across study documents, including design documents, evaluation reports, research reports, assessment reports, etc. When using this template, change all text (headings, titles, body text, etc.) to your content.

## Graphics and Formatting

Reports must conform to USAID branding requirements (see [ADS 320](http://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/320))[[1]](#footnote-2) and comply with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (see [ADS 302mak](http://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/302mak)).[[2]](#footnote-3) The most important items to remember regarding graphics and formatting:

1. Apply USAID’s identity and branding according to the [USAID Graphics Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide](https://www.usaid.gov/branding/gsm).[[3]](#footnote-4)
2. Use USAID colors:
	* Primary Color Palette
* **USAID Blue** (RGB 0R 42G 108B)
* **USAID Red** (RGB 194R 17G 58B)
* **Solid Black** (RGB 0R 0G 0B)
	+ Secondary Color Palette
* **Dark Gray** (RGB 102R 102G 102B)
* **Light Gray** (RGB 221R 221G 221B)[[4]](#footnote-5)
* **Light Blue** (RGB 157R 191G 229B)[[5]](#footnote-6)
1. Use USAID fonts (Gill Sans or Gill Sans MT (bold for headlines, subheads and highlighted text; regular or light for body text; italic for captions), or Garamond or Ariel if Gill Sans not available. Follow the font styles provided below:

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## Designing a Quality Study

Studies which rely upon primary data collection should refer to the Assessment of Study Quality (ASQ) Tool for guidance on designing, implementing, and reporting on a quality study.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Reports should address and document the following items, as applicable to the study methods:

| **PRINCIPLE OF QUALITY** | **EXPERIMENTAL/QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL** | **OBSERVATIONAL** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **QUANTITATIVE** | **QUALITATIVE** |
| CONCEPTUAL FRAMING | * clear and useful study questions [all studies]
* hypotheses (if applicable) [all studies]
* conceptual/theoretical framework or theory of change [all studies]
* existing relevant research [all studies]
* local context [all studies]
 |
| ROBUSTNESS OF METHODOLOGY | * selection of appropriate method(s) [all studies]
* rigorous counterfactual [experimental/quasi-experimental studies and impact evaluations]
* triangulation of data [all studies]
* mitigation of common biases or threats [all studies]
* appropriate sampling approach and size
 |
| CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS | * cultural relevance of questions and methods [all studies]
* culturally appropriate tools [all studies]
* validated findings, conclusions, and recommendations [all studies]
* account for locally relevant stratifiers [all studies]
 |
| ETHICS | * human subjects’ protection and risk mitigation [all studies]
* research clearance(s) or IRBs/ERCs [all studies]
 |
| VALIDITY | * indicators/constructs capture the relevant phenomenon [all studies]
* influence of doing the study on the findings [all studies]
* alternative explanations or credibility of findings [all studies]
* external validity or the transferability of findings [all studies]
* standard errors and confidence intervals [experimental/quasi-experimental and observational quantitative studies]
 |
| RELIABILITY | * reliable data collection procedures [all studies]
* internal consistency of data collection instruments [experimental/quasi-experimental and observational quantitative studies]
* inter-rater reliability [experimental/quasi-experimental and observational quantitative studies]
* inter-coder reliability [observational qualitative studies]
* missing data/non-response [all studies]
 |
| OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY | * limitations to study design and implementation [all studies]
* limitations due to the intervention [all evaluation studies]
* bias due to study team composition [all studies]
* clearly explained methodology [all studies]
* cost analysis of the intervention [impact evaluations]
 |
| COGENCY | * answers to all study questions and sub-questions in the Executive Summary and the report [all studies]
* written for the intended audience [all studies]
* relevant and actionable recommendations [all studies]
* clear progression from questions to methodology to findings to conclusions [all studies]
* relevant visualizations [all studies]
 |

# Front Cover

As with all USAID publications, the front cover has the following elements:

* Use [USAID standard graphic identity/brand](https://www.usaid.gov/branding/gsm).
* Place the USAID identity in the upper left area in a white field that is one or two horizontal bars in height (the cover should be divided into nine equal horizontal bars).
* If jointly funded and co-branded (with a partner or another donor’s brand), request lower-left placement for USAID’s brand, and all brands/identities should be of equal size and prominence, preferably along the bottom of the cover.

# Evaluation Covers

To distinguish evaluations from other type of publications also include:

* A light blue field one or two bars in height behind the evaluation title with the word “Evaluation” above the title
* A photograph from the project being evaluated, and sized to cover the width of the cover, with height taking up four or five horizontal bars.
* Since external evaluations are not USAID authored, the following statement must be on the cover: “This publication was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared independently by <list authors and/or organizations involved in the preparation of the report>.”

# Inside Front Cover

The inside front cover of a publication may be left blank or used for a variety of purposes such as acknowledgements, front cover photo caption, abstracts, etc.

# Study Purpose

Note: Rename the section heading to indicate the type of study (i.e., “Evaluation Purpose,” “Research Purpose,” “Assessment Purpose”).

The study purpose, audience, and intended use should be clearly defined at the beginning of the document. It should describe in about one to two pages why the study is being conducted and why it is being conducted now, how the findings are expected to be used, and who the main audiences are for the study report. For **evaluation designs**, the purpose should also: (1) identify the evaluation as an impact or performance evaluation, (2) state the commissioning Operating Unit (OU), the purpose of, audience for, and anticipated use(s) of the evaluation, (3) state award numbers, award dates, funding levels, and implementing partners, as applicable, (4) describe who will use the results of the evaluation and how they will use it, and (5) describe what specific decisions will be informed by the evaluation.

# Project Background

In one to three pages, the study team should clearly describe the problem being studied, the local, country, and/or sector context, and the conceptual or theoretical framework(s) which inform the study. For **evaluation designs**, the evaluator should also clearly outline the activity(ies) being evaluated, including the original problem or challenge the project is designed to address and the underlying development hypothesis, or causal logic, of the project or the broader program of which the project is a part. If a results framework (for strategies, objectives or programs) or logical framework (for projects) is available, this should be included here. For projects designed under the project design guidance released in 2011, the evaluation team should have access to the final project appraisal document and related annexes (which includes a logical framework and original monitoring and evaluation plans, among other things). This information provides important context for understanding the evaluation purpose, questions, and approach.

The study team should address the elements from the conceptual framing principle of quality from the ASQ Tool.

# Study Approach and Data

Note: Rename the sub-section heading to indicate the type of study (i.e., “Evaluation Questions and Indicators,” “Research Questions,” “Assessment Questions”).

## Study Questions and Indicators

Note: Rename the sub-section heading to indicate the type of study (i.e., “Evaluation Questions and Indicators,” “Research Questions,” “Assessment Questions”).

For **study designs**, the study team should include specific questions focused on the problem being studied, key program areas and/or performance (for evaluations) and directly link them to the purpose of the study and its expected use. Sub-questions or narrative text may be included to elaborate on the main question, but not to add new lines of inquiry. If applicable, the study team should include study hypotheses in this section and directly link them to the purpose of this study and its expected use. As applicable, the study team should ensure that questions are informed by local stakeholders, culturally relevant, and contextually appropriate. For each study question, the study team should specify the indicators to be used to capture the construct or phenomenon being investigated. For **evaluation designs**, the evaluation team should include a small number of evaluation questions (one to five questions are recommended) that are appropriate to the type of evaluation, are relevant to future programmatic decisions or learning, and can be answered with empirical evidence. Address any changes to the questions proposed in the SOW in this section. For **impact evaluation designs**, the questions must measure the magnitude of change in specific outcomes attributable to the USAID intervention(s).

The study team should address elements from the conceptual framing, cultural appropriateness, and validity principles of quality from the ASQ Tool.

## Methodology

The study team should describe the overarching approach you will recommend to answer the study questions. The overarching analytical strategy should be clearly summarized in a study matrix that links the study questions, sub-questions, and hypotheses (if applicable) to the indicators or assessment criteria, sampling/selection criteria, data sources and collection methods, and data analysis methods. A justification for the stratifiers should be provided, such as an explanation for political, geographical or sex/gender phenomena justifying the selection. The various components of the matrix should then be flushed out in narrative in the sections below. For **evaluation designs**, identify (1) all evaluation questions which require sex-disaggregated data, the use of gender-sensitive data collection methods, and analysis of sex-specific differential impacts, (2) evaluation questions requiring the use of data for which usage rights or consent must be obtained, and (3) existing and relevant strategy, project, or activity documents or performance information sources the OU will make available to the evaluation team. Address any changes to the methodology proposed in the SOW in this section.

For **impact evaluation designs**, the methodology must (1) examine the implementation of the intervention(s) evaluated, including whether it followed the scope and/or work plan and any major challenges in implementation, (2) use experimental or quasi-experimental methods, and (3) include detailed description of the method of deriving the comparison group. For quasi-experimental methods, the evaluation team must provide an explanation of how the comparison group will be formed and the data sources used to identify comparison group respondents.

The study team should address elements from the robustness of methodology, cultural appropriateness, and openness and transparency principles of quality from the ASQ Tool.

## Sampling Strategy/Selection of Respondents

For **probability sampling**, the study team should propose a sampling strategy that is consistent with the study needs. The description of the sampling strategy should include at least: (1) the anticipated approach to determine the sampling frame, (2) the stratification strategy, and (3) the minimum detectable effect calculations and the final sample size. The final sampling strategy should be determined in consultation with USAID.

For **qualitative sampling**, the study team should propose a robust strategy for selecting respondents and final sample size that is appropriate for the study objectives. Criteria for sample selection should be determined in consultation with USAID.

The study team should provide a plan for data triangulation as appropriate. As part of the plan, the study team should specifically discuss how the qualitative and quantitative data will be weighted and integrated (whenever relevant) to address the evaluation questions.

The study team should address elements from the robustness of methodology, cultural appropriateness, and reliability principles of quality from the ASQ Tool.

## Data Sources and Collection Methods

For each study question, including sub-questions and hypotheses, the study team should identify the data that already exists or will need to be collected in order to answer the study question.

Whenever possible, the study team should use pre-existing data collection instruments with strong measurement validity and internal reliability, which are documented, and with a suitable plan for cultural adaptation. For new instruments, the study team should propose a plan for the development, cognitive testing, and piloting of the new data collection instruments. It should be noted that:

* Data collection instruments should be shared with USAID for review and feedback before they are used in the field.
* Issues of data confidentiality must be addressed as part of the IRB process.
* When relevant and possible, electronic data collection for quantitative data should be used.
* Data collection methods must take into account contextual factors to maximize data reliability and minimize unintended consequences.

All studies involving human subjects must adhere to ethical standards and protect the human subjects involved. Per ADS 200mbe and the USAID Scientific Research Policy, all studies which involve human subjects must consult an IRB or ERC and receive IRB/ERC approval or “exempt” status. Studies being conducted in other countries must follow the local research clearance and IRB/ERC requirements in the country of the study. The study team should briefly describe plans to obtain IRB/ERC approval or “exempt” status and local research clearance for the study. The study team should refer to the [USAID Ethics in Research and Evaluation in the Education Sector Policy Brief](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/ethics-research-and-evaluation-education-sector-0)[[7]](#footnote-8) to ensure adherence to USAID ethical standards and policies.

All draft study questionnaire(s), survey(s), FGD guides, etc., which the study team may use for the study, should be included in the annexes.

The study team should address elements from the conceptual framing, cultural appropriateness, ethics, validity, and reliability principles of quality from the ASQ Tool.

## Field Work

In this section, the study team should describe the process to carry out the field work.

The study team should address elements from the reliability principle of quality from the ASQ Tool.

## Analysis Plan

The study team should describe the approach for analyzing the different types of data, including qualitative and quantitative data. The analytic approach should be commensurate with the purpose of the study and the study questions and consider key requirements such as disaggregation by sex. Any data analysis related to cost should be consistent with [USAID’s cost guidance](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/usaid-education-cost-measurement-toolkit).[[8]](#footnote-9)

The study team should address elements from the robustness of methodology, cultural appropriateness, validity, reliability, and openness and transparency principles of quality from the ASQ Tool.

## Reporting

The study team should list specific deliverables, reporting requirements, audiences, and timeframes. Study reports should be consistent with USAID’s Office of Education reporting templates and the ASQ Tool.

The study team may choose to indicate how they will address elements under the cogency principle of quality from the ASQ Tool in the findings report.

## Limitations of the Proposed Approach

The study team should specify issues that may prevent the ability to reach the overarching purpose of the study or to fully answer the study questions. The discussion of limitations should include both limitations with the implementation of the study (such as issues faced during data collection that may affect the study design) and, for **evaluations**, limitations due to issues with the implementation of the intervention being evaluated. Whenever possible and relevant, the study team should outline steps to mitigate threats to the integrity of the evaluation or biases.

The study team should address elements from the robustness of methodology, validity, reliability, and openness and transparency principles of quality from the ASQ Tool.

# Work Plan

In this section, the study team should outline the anticipated schedule and logistical arrangements and list the members of the study team, delineated by roles and responsibilities.

# Dissemination Plan

The study team should state how the products from the study will be disseminated, discussed with key stakeholder groups, or indicate other activities that are to come from the study, at different stages of the study. For example, this may include a working session with the Mission and implementing partner (IP) during implementation to help the IP understand selection criteria and how an impact evaluation works. Or it may suggest plans for presenting the findings as a part of a panel at a conference. Regardless, these should reflect the Mission’s/Office’s needs.

# Annexes

Annex I: Study Statement of Work

Note: Rename the Annex heading to indicate the type of study (i.e., “Evaluation Statement of Work,” “Research Statement of Work,” “Assessment Statement of Work”).

The final Study Statement of Work (SOW) that guided the study team should be included as an annex. Refer to [ADS 201mab](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/201mab.pdf).[[9]](#footnote-10)

Annex II: Data Collection Instruments and IRB Materials

Include any data collection instruments such as surveys, interview questionnaires, focus group moderator guides, direct observation checklists, or any others. Informed consent/assent protocols should be included with the data collection instruments. Additional IRB/ERC materials, such as participant recruitment plans, the IRB protocol, human subject risk mitigation plans, or other applicable documents, should be included in the annex as applicable.

\*\* You may place other materials used for data collection, such as training manual, in the annex.

Annex III: Estimated LOE and Staffing Plan

Use the template provided.

Annex IV: Roles and Responsibilities Matrix

Annex V: Timeline with Deliverables and Milestones

You can include this as your work plan using the template provided.

Annex VI: Finalized Budget

This will not be shared in the public version. All procurement sensitive materials will be removed prior to sharing.

1. [ADS Chapter 320](http://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/320) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [ADS Reference 302mak](http://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/300/302mak) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [USAID Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide](https://www.usaid.gov/branding/gsm) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. This color does not meet 508 color contrast requirements against a white background. Only use this color on a dark background. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. This color does not meet 508 color contrast requirements against a white background. Only use this color on a dark background. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The Assessment of Study Quality (ASQ) Tool is a framework on the quality of research and evaluation. The tool codifies best practices in designing, implementing, and reporting on studies. The tool is designed around eight “Principles of Quality” of evidence. Refer to the [ASQ Tool](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/assessing-quality-education-evaluations-tool) for detailed guidance. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. [Ethics in Research and Evaluation in the Education Sector](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/ethics-research-and-evaluation-education-sector-0) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [USAID Education Cost Measurement Toolkit](https://www.edu-links.org/resources/usaid-education-cost-measurement-toolkit) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [USAID Evaluation Statement of Work Requirements](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/201mab.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)