

# Evaluation Standards of the Swiss Evaluation Society

Adopted (in German and French) by the General Assembly on 9 September 2016.

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## Introduction

### **Purpose and scope of these standards**

The Evaluation Standards published by the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL Standards) aim to contribute to the professionalization of evaluation practice in Switzerland. Adhering to the main principles expressed in these Standards will help to increase the quality and credibility of evaluations.

The SEVAL Standards provide a foundation and help in planning and carrying out evaluations, drafting mandates, tenders and evaluation agreements, and ensuring quality during evaluations or in subsequent assessments. They can also be used as teaching materials for professional training and development.

The SEVAL Standards may be applied to all types of evaluations, regardless of their institutional context, the procedures chosen, and the specific sector, and regardless of whether it is an external, an internal or a self-evaluation. The SEVAL Standards are not designed for evaluating persons.

### **Application of the SEVAL Standards in practice**

The SEVAL Standards are formulated as fundamental principles. However, the background, organization, theoretical and practical approach, and the way a specific evaluation is carried out differ from case to case. When applying the standards, they must thus be adapted to the specific situation. Individual standards are interrelated. They should therefore always be interpreted within the context of the actual evaluation and taking into account the standards as a whole. The explanations provided for the individual standards are intended to help in applying them.

### **Audience of the SEVAL Standards**

The quality of any evaluation does not only depend on the evaluators themselves, but is the result of the interaction of various people assuming various roles in the process. The SEVAL Standards are therefore addressed to all those who are involved in an evaluation or who influence it in some way.

These include:

- evaluators who design and carry out evaluations;
- clients, i.e. those who define the purpose and scope of the evaluations and commission evaluators to carry them out;
- any others involved, particularly those who follow, evaluate and/or use evaluations;
- anyone working in professional evaluation training and development who helps ensure the SEVAL Standards are understood and applied.

### Origin of the SEVAL Standards

The first SEVAL Standards<sup>1</sup> were adopted in 2001. They were based on the Program Evaluation Standards presented by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. At the time, these were grouped according to the four quality criteria: utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy and were adapted to the Swiss context by a SEVAL working group. The SEVAL Standards were revised from 2013 to 2016. The principles set out in the previous standards were transferred into a new structure. This included editorial alignments and the inclusion of certain new content.

## Definitions and concepts

### Evaluation

The SEVAL Standards are based on the following conception of evaluation: **An evaluation is a systematic and transparent analysis and assessment of the design, implementation and/or effects of an evaluation object.** Evaluations are scientific procedures and use scientific methodology. Common evaluation objects are policies, regulations, strategies, plans, programmes, projects, interventions, services, organizations, procedures, events, technologies or materials.

Evaluations adopt an ex-ante, accompanying or retrospective perspective. Evaluations may be carried out with the purpose of knowledge acquisition, accountability, decision making, improving and managing the evaluation object or stimulating learning processes among the stakeholders. The term 'evaluation' is used for both the process and the result.

### Quality of evaluations

The quality of an evaluation is determined by the following four criteria. These can be seen as points of reference that are significant and ideally applicable to the same extent in all stages and processes of an evaluation:

- **Utility:** An evaluation targets the defined purposes and information needs of the intended users. Evaluations should be informative, effective and be conducted at an appropriate time. Evaluators should become familiar with the audiences of the evaluation and their information needs, then plan and carry out the evaluation according to these needs, and finally present their results clearly and in good time.
- **Feasibility:** An evaluation should be planned and carried out so that it is adapted to the existing circumstances, well thought-through and cost-effective. The goal should be to reach the greatest possible acceptance by the various stakeholders. Usually, evaluations involve a large number of people and can be time-consuming for everyone involved. Consequently, they should only use as many resources, ma-

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<sup>1</sup> Widmer, Thomas; Landert, Charles and Bachmann, Nicole, 2000, Evaluations-Standards der Schweizerischen Evaluationsgesellschaft (SEVAL), 5 December 2000.

terial, staff, time and money as required for achieving the purpose and answering the evaluation questions.

- **Propriety:** An evaluation should be conducted in a legally and ethically correct way and carried out in a respectful and unbiased manner. Evaluations affect many people and organizations in different ways and may even constitute an imposition. Propriety requires that the rights of those involved be protected, that stakeholders be treated with respect, and that evaluations be carried out with due sensitivity with regard to ethical and legal issues. Propriety also requires an unbiased and impartial attitude on the part of the evaluators and consideration for the legitimate interests of the stakeholders.
- **Accuracy:** An evaluation should provide appropriate, valid and applicable information that is developed using methodologically robust tools. The assessment provided must have a logical connection to the information collected.

## SEVAL Standards

The SEVAL Standards define what is required of evaluations in order to meet the quality criteria utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy. They refer to the activities and requirements of evaluation processes and provide a framework for professional evaluation practice intended to result in high-quality evaluations.

### Structure of the Standards

The SEVAL Standards are divided into three groups. The standards in group A describe general principles that are important in evaluations regardless of the particular activities or processes involved. They mainly concern the conditions required for high-quality evaluations. The standards in group B relate to practical aspects to be taken into account when planning and implementing an evaluation. Group C contains standards relating to for assessing and communicating results. The individual standards are allocated to the group for which they are most significant. The standards are grouped and ordered in a way that facilitates orientation. This does not imply either a linear or chronological sequence, or any hierarchy between individual standards.

### Review of the SEVAL Standards

The SEVAL Standards are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are still useful, applicable and up to date, taking into account international developments in this field.

# **A – General principles**

## **A1 Openness for results and impartiality**

An evaluation is designed as a process open for any results and ensuring an impartial assessment.

## **A2 Transparency**

An evaluation is designed and carried out in a transparent way. The purpose, procedure and grounds of the assessment and the results are disclosed so that the evaluation can be understood and verified.

## **A3 Attention to stakeholders**

The persons and organizations due to be involved in the evaluation and affected by it are identified. Appropriate attention is paid to their interests, needs and values.

## **A4 Alignment on use**

An evaluation is planned and carried out, and its progress and results are communicated, in such a way that the stakeholders are inspired to engage adequately in the process and to make use of the process as well as the results.

## **A5 Suitable cost-benefit ratio**

An evaluation is designed in such a way that that its benefits justify the investments.

## **A6 Ensuring the necessary skills**

Whoever plans, commissions, supervises or carries out an evaluation has the necessary skills or ensures that these are sufficiently available.

## **A7 Quality assurance**

Suitable measures are taken to ensure the quality of an evaluation while it is being carried out as well as after it is completed.

## **A8 Legal compliance**

The legal requirements relevant for all activities carried out within the scope of an evaluation are identified and complied with.

## **A9 Privacy and confidentiality**

Rights relating to privacy, personality and data protection must be guaranteed. If confidentiality is required by law or needed to protect legitimate interests, all necessary measures are taken to ensure that sensitive information is not used without the consent of the persons providing that data and that it cannot be traced back to the source.

## **A10 Ethics**

All activities carried out in relation to an evaluation uphold ethical principles and are sensitive towards social and cultural diversity.

## **A11 Respect**

All persons or organizations that are involved in or affected by an evaluation are treated respectfully, fairly and impartially.

## **A12 Honesty**

All stakeholders behave honestly in relation to an evaluation and should refrain from hindering the evaluation process, misusing the evaluation, distorting or misrepresenting its results.

# **B – Planning and carrying out an evaluation**

## **B1 Clarifying the evaluation object, purpose, evaluation questions and use**

The object, purpose, evaluation questions and intended use of an evaluation are defined in such a way that they are clear to all stakeholders involved.

## **B2 Consideration of the context**

The influence of the context on the object of the evaluation is identified and taken into account.

## **B3 Timeliness**

An evaluation is planned and carried out in such a way that its results are available in time for their intended use.

## **B4 Evaluation agreement**

As early as possible, clients and evaluators come to a binding agreement concerning the essential elements of an evaluation and set them out in writing. These include the purpose, the object, the questions and the methodology of the evaluation; the duties and rights of stakeholders involved; available resources; deadlines for submitting partial results and reporting; and the disclosure and communication of the evaluation and its results.

## **B5 Appropriate evaluation design**

An evaluation is designed according to the object being evaluated, the purpose and the questions to be answered and, if appropriate, a causation model of the object of the evaluation. The approach, assessment criteria, collection methods and the process are defined in such a way that the purpose of the evaluation can be achieved as well as possible with the available resources and the results provide the greatest possible benefit.

## **B6 Scientific approach in data collection and analysis**

The choice of data sources and the methods used for collecting and analysing data are adapted to the evaluation questions to be answered, the specific information needs and data availability. Scientific principles are applied to data collection and analysis, taking account of relevant research and ethics standards, and the requirements of good practice.

## **B7 Reasonable data collection**

The choice and scope of the data to be collected and analysed are limited to what is necessary to fulfil the purpose of the evaluation. It is ensured that the data collection influences and compromises the object of the evaluation as little as possible.

## **B8 Validity and reliability of data collection**

Data sources and procedures for collecting and analysing data are used in such a way that the validity, reliability of the results and their interpretation are ensured for the intended purpose.

### **B9 Quality and relevance of information**

The methodology and the data and information collected, processed and presented in an evaluation are systematically checked for quality, errors and relevance.

## **C – Assessing and communicating results**

### **C1 Complete and fair assessment**

The assessment of an evaluation object is complete and fair and conducted in such a way that its strengths can be developed and its shortcomings can be overcome.

### **C2 Transparent assessment and justified conclusions**

An evaluation object is assessed in a systematic way. The criteria and the empirical bases of the assessment and the procedure used are stated clearly. Conclusions are drawn from the available data and justified.

### **C3 Useful recommendations**

Any recommendations are justified, specific, intended for the target audience and feasible.

### **C4 Adequate reporting**

An evaluation report presents all information relevant for the understanding and transparency of an evaluation in a way that is easily understandable, transparent, and suitable for the target audience. It describes the object of the evaluation, including its context as well as the purpose, the questions, procedure, information sources, results, and relevance of the evaluation, in a balanced and impartial way.

### **C5 Documentation of the evaluation**

If required, all additional materials necessary for third-parties to verify the results are documented as a supplement to the report.

### **C6 Access to evaluation results**

The stakeholders are given access to the results of the evaluation.