Performance Management Plan

The first tool we encounter in the planning phase of a M.E.A.L. system is the Performance Management Plan (PMP), also referred to as a monitoring and evaluation plan. The PMP serves to clarify what specifically will be monitored and evaluated and how these activities will take place. Therefore, regardless of size or complexity, every project should have one.

How a PMP works

PMPs are built from the logframe and provide more detailed information about specific M.E.A.L. activities such as indicator definitions, data collection frequencies, and responsibilities.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (PNP)								
Objective statements	Indicators	Data Collection				Means of Analysis		Use of information
		Method	Frequency	Person Responsible	Respondents	Type of Analysis	Comparison Groups	
Strategic objective 1								
Strategic objective 2								
Intermediate result 1.1								
Intermediate result 2.1								
Output 1.1.1								
Output 1.1.2								
Key assumptions								
Assumption 1								
Assumption 2								

A PMP answers questions such as, "how are the indicators defined?"; "who is responsible for M.E.A.L. activities and when will they take place?"; "how will the data be analyzed and used?". Above, you can see the PMP table, to fill it we start from the information that we have inserted in the logframe, beginning with the objective statements. If necessary, the team can include written explanations as an accompaniment to the PMP table. In particular, we need to transfer the strategic objectives, from intermediate results and output levels into statements.

The next steps

The next step is to transfer the assumptions from the logframe. This is important to track key assumptions throughout the project and to determine if they are still valid. Tracking assumptions is important in the risk management process because if the assumptions are no longer valid, the underlying logic of the project becomes flawed and you need to be able to recognize this in order to change it. Then add the indicators, also transferring these from the logframe. To make the indicators clearer, a small amount of space can be included for definitions (although it is preferable to add these definitions as an attachment to the PMP).

The third step is related to data collection, that includes methods, frequency, responsibility, and respondents. Some of this information are available in the logframe and some are not: the measurement methods that are already in the logframe, can be transferred directly from the PMP; the frequency information, which indicates when and how often you will collect data, is based on several factors including donor requests, context (e.g. you need to consider holidays or public holidays) or available resources; the identification of the person responsible for data collection, who is chosen based on the overall project implementation team; and finally identifying interviewees, who are the people who can give you the most reliable data for each indicator. In the PMP you will find a dedicated space in which you mention whom you will interview to collect data for each indicator (e.g. head of household, women, working-age youth, etc.).

Means of analysis and use of information

The last step is to fill the columns related to the means of analysis. This section asks you to think about what method you will use to collect data: you can use quantitative methods, which will help you analyze the data statistically; or you can use qualitative methods, which will help you analyze the data using what is called content analysis (this is a process of reviewing notes from focus groups and interviews to develop themes). The choice should be indicated in the Type of Analysis column.

When planning the data analysis, if you intend to collect data from several comparison groups (called subgroups or strata), you should enter this information in the penultimate column of the PMP. Identifying comparison groups is useful for disaggregating the data you collect from each group. Disaggregation is the practice of dividing data collected from a population into groups according to key characteristics (e.g. women, men, adults under 30, etc.). This practice allows you to identify trends, patterns, or intuitions that might not emerge if the data were examined as a whole. Remember that you will have to invest time and money for this practice, so make sure it is really necessary.

The final step to complete the PMP table is to add information about how the collected data will be used. Be sure not to limit the use of data to reporting, but ask how your data might be used to guide decisions in regular project management or monitoring meetings, and how it might be communicated regularly to the stakeholders.

The Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT)

The Indicator Performance Tracking Table (IPTT) through a simple and concise table, aims to show where the project stands in relation to its original (and revised) objectives and shows progress against the indicators. In this table, the indicators are listed vertically, in the same order as the PMP. Horizontally, however, we record the initial baseline measurements for each indicator and then status updates by reporting period.

IPTT is used because it allows progress against established indicators to be tracked over time, through an easy-to-understand format. It also improves accountability for reporting project progress and helps compare project progress to others within the organization or those external (but occurring in the same context). Finally, it is important because it prompts you to apply critical thinking to understand the evidence by comparing actual versus expected performance.
As already said, being a M.E.A.L. tool the IPTT can change in format and content depending on the context. Sometimes, it is the donors themselves who request specific IPTT templates.

The components

IPTT is characterized by two main components: baselines and targets.

Baseline is the value of an indicator before implementation of an activity, against which subsequent progress can be assessed. Baseline data can be generated from primary or secondary sources. If it is collected from a primary source, it means that the project team does the collecting. However, because it is a complicated and expensive process, many choose to work with stakeholders to build the baseline data using secondary sources, which include the use of government statistics, information from another project, etc.

Indeed, when we talk about Target we refer to a specific, planned level of change you want to achieve during the life of the project. Targets identify the planned level of change (a number or percentage) that is expected to be seen as a result of project implementation. Please note, while the logframe includes the FINAL goal for an indicator, the IPTT includes OBJECTIVES OVER TIME, which help the team and stakeholders track progress against smaller targets throughout the life of the project.

Obviously, targets at different levels of the IPTT have different data collection frequencies, and at the output level, annual indicator targets are broken down into quarterly metrics.
Since it is important to update the table with the latest monitoring data, the IPTT should be used as an agenda item for team meetings, such as monthly meetings that are scheduled to discuss implementation issues.

The Data Flow Map

Data Flow Map is a tool that describes how information flows within the M.E.A.L. system and it is used to improve the way you can work with data. In a project, your information needs are dictated by the indicator reports you have committed to with your stakeholders. By creating a data flow map, you can identify the forms and collection processes that will help you collect the needed data to meet the information-sharing commitments you have made. Creating this map will engage your team in the process and help you find points where you may need to create a new form or report.

How to create a data flow map

Assuming that the design of your data flow map depends largely on the complexity of the project, let's look together at the steps to create it.

The first step is to identify all reporting requirements, both internal and external, using information from the PMP. Next, you must determine and document which indicators will be included in each report and map the processes, identifying which sources inform which reports. Also, it is necessary to include in the map who is responsible for data collection and reporting based on the information in the PMP. Finally, you should ensure that all reporting needs are met by the current data collection process and indicators, simplifying as much as possible the system.

During the creation of the map, you might develop new ideas about reporting and data collection processes, which bring you to revisit the PMP, which should be a living document, something that is updated as your understanding of the project and your information needs changes.

With the Data Flow Map, we finish exploring the first part of M.E.A.L.'s planning phase, about monitoring. Next, let's explore the tools that you can use for the evaluation part of the planning.

Planning Evaluation in M.E.A.L.System

A required practice in the world of project design is project evaluation activities, which should always be included and can vary depending on the size of the project. If a project does not include a formal evaluation, it should include an ex-post evaluation, considering that it is often the donors themselves who request a final evaluation of the project. Since assessment can take time and money and is a complex activity, planning can help use resources wisely while meeting information needs.

Your information needs and the related assessment questions you identify determine the type of evaluation you choose and the timing of your evaluation(s). In addition, the data collection methods used also vary depending on the type of assessment chosen. Depending on the goals of the assessment, you will choose the most appropriate method, choosing whether to rely more on quantitative or qualitative data. In making this choice, you will also find that you will need a mix of methods to gather the information you need to answer the evaluation questions.

Evaluation type

In this section, let's see what types of evaluation you can choose based on your information needs. Each of these types has different timing and purpose.

You can choose to use a Formative Evaluation, which is intended to improve an existing project and is conducted at the beginning of project implementation, through the middle; or a Process Evaluation, which is done often in the middle of the project or at the end and is intended to understand how a project is implemented (or has been implemented) if you want to replicate the response.

You can also choose an Impact Outcome Evaluation, which assesses how successful a project has been in achieving its goal of producing change and is done at the end of the project, as it requires both baseline data collected at the beginning of the project and activity data collected through rigorous monitoring.

Another type of evaluation you can use is the Summative Evaluation, which you can do at the end of the project to judge its performance. One particular type of assessment, often used in policy-making settings, is the Meta-evaluation: external to the project cycle, is a systematic and formal evaluation of evaluations that examines the methods used within an evaluation or set of evaluations to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

After the formal end date of the project, often between three and five years later, an Ex-post Evaluation can be used to assess the long-term sustainability of the project. And lastly, there is the Empowerment Evaluation which allows participants to evaluate the project as it is being implemented. This type of evaluation becomes part of project implementation, so participants require training and facilitation in evaluation tools.

Now that you have a general overview of the existing types of evaluation, let's look at two specific tools you can use in your project evaluations.

Summary Evaluation Table

The first of the two tools that are used in project evaluation is the Summary Evaluation Table (SET). SET is a table that documents key decisions about your evaluation plans, including the purpose of the evaluation; the key evaluation questions; the timing of the evaluation, and the budget.

After deciding the type of evaluation you want to do, you start filling out the SET, completing the table at the beginning of your project, to build the details of the evaluations your project intends to conduct.

Evaluation Purpose (Performance, Impact, etc.)	Priority Evaluation Questions	Timing (mid-project, final, etc.)	Anticipated Evaluation Start and Completion		Evaluation Budget
			Start	End	

How to complete the table

First, it is important to determine the type of evaluation you want to conduct and the purpose of the evaluation. Keep in mind that for larger projects, there may be multiple evaluations. Then identify the evaluation criteria; these are used to guide the development of the evaluation questions and to direct the overall planning of the evaluation. After establishing the criteria, identify the actual assessment questions that will guide your evaluation. These questions are clear statements of what you want to know through the evaluation. Finally, establish a timeline for the assessment and a predicted budget. This should be done with high-level estimates.

Evaluation Criteria

Now, let's look at what the evaluation criteria mentioned above are. Evaluation Criteria are a set of principles that guide the creation of evaluation questions and evaluation planning in general. The most commonly used ones come from the OECD-DAC (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development- Development Assistance Committee):

- Relevance: the extent to which the project is relevant to the priorities, needs, and opportunities of the target group, recipient, and donor;
- Coherence: the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution;
- Efficiency: the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way;
- Effectiveness: the extent to which a project attains its objectives;
- Impact: the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects;
- Sustainability: the extent to which the benefits of a project are likely to continue after support (monetary and non-monetary) has been withdrawn.

Because the criteria depend on the type of evaluation chosen, they should never be applied mechanically but should be covered according to the needs of the relevant stakeholders and the context of the evaluation. In fact, data availability, resource constraints, time constraints, and methodological considerations may influence how a particular criterion is covered. As for the assessment questions, these are clear statements of what you need to know from the assessment and depend on the evaluation criteria.

In addition to this tool just described, there is also another evaluation tool, the ToR.

Evaluation Terms of Reference

A much more detailed planning document than the SET is the Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR), a tool that provides updated and more detailed evaluation questions based on experience and learning gained from the development of the SET.

The ToR becomes a planning document for the evaluation itself and a specific ToR is needed for each project evaluation. Those in charge of the ToR should then have time to collaboratively create it before the planned time of the evaluation arrives. Collaboration is important because it helps ensure that the information needs of all stakeholders are addressed by the evaluation. In addition, it is an opportunity to clarify and agree on stakeholder expectations regarding data collection, analysis, and use. Collaboration also serves to avoid wasting time and money, because if the assessment does not meet stakeholder needs, it will not be used to inform future decisions. Formulating a ToR is important whether you plan to hire an external evaluator or use an in-house evaluation team. And lastly, a partnership with the overall project team is helpful because it allows you to ensure that the project budget and schedule include the time and resources you will need to conduct the evaluation.

What information must ToR contain?

The Evaluation Terms of Reference are created closer to the time of the evaluation and are informed by not only the SET but also experience and data collected to date. It should include a variety of information such as:

- Project introduction and background: it must briefly describe the project, implementation period, funding sources and amounts, and any other relevant information. It must include a summary of the project, the problem it seeks to solve, and its intervention strategy. In addition, it must include baseline and monitoring data already collected.

- Evaluation purpose, audience, and use: it is important because it explains why you are conducting the evaluation, who will use it (internally and externally), and how it will be used. You need to be clear and specific in this section to increase the chances that the results of the evaluation will be timely available and relevant to your stakeholders.

- Evaluation criteria and questions: based on your monitoring results, you may need to revise the criteria and evaluation questions on the summary form. Be realistic about the number of questions to include in your evaluation ToR, considering only those you need to answer and can realistically answer within the time and budget available to you.

- Methodological approach: your ToR should include a basic description of a suggested approach that incorporates the monitoring processes and data already in place and suggests additional ideas. If your donor has required a certain type of evaluation and included related funding, then you will need to specify those requirements here. However, remember to link each method to the questions that need to be answered.

- Evaluation roles and responsibilities: it is important that you remember to describe the various roles and responsibilities of the evaluation team and describe how a potential external evaluator or evaluation team will communicate with the project. Also, be sure to include details about the responsibility for producing the report. It is important at this stage to be specific about what is expected of stakeholders and how they will be involved. Involving stakeholders in the evaluation process allows them to take ownership of the results, thereby increasing the chances of high-quality follow-up.

- Evaluation deliverables and timeline: remember to specify the timeline for the evaluation and plan time for document review, fieldwork, data analysis, and report writing. Be sure to include time for stakeholder feedback and response.

- Evaluation logistics and other support, i.e., you will need to indicate whether there will be support from local partners, particularly in terms of data collection, and if necessary, allow extra time when conducting more complex assessments to design samples and finalize databases and data entry plans.

If you are interested in knowing more about project writing and evaluation, and would like to have the assistance of professionals, you can email us at ssr@signis.net. At SIGNIS Services Rome we are experts in the sector and have been involved in project writing for the creation and development of communications projects all over the world for decades.

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