



**UNEG**  
United Nations Evaluation Group

Working Paper

## Modalities for Evaluating, reviewing or assessing an Evaluation Function

This document was prepared by the UNEG Professional Peer Review working group as a document to inform discussions at the 2018 AGM.

The purpose of the document is to capture and summarize modalities to evaluate, review or assess the evaluation functions of UNEG member agencies. Each description addresses the pros and cons of the modality against Independence, Credibility and Utility (ICU) criteria.

The descriptions are set out in three categories: 1) Approaches that have been previously used by UN Evaluation functions; 2) Proposed approaches that may have potential for use by UNEG members; and 3) Other 'providers' of assessments for UN Evaluation functions.

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## A. Approaches that have previously been used by UN Evaluation functions

### Independent External Evaluations

Examples of UN organizations that have used this modality include ILO, UNDP and FAO. An independent evaluation of the evaluation function is undertaken by external consultant evaluators that are managed by a separate Committee that operates either as a part of an organization’s internal oversight mechanism or as a Sub-committee of the Board / Governing body. These are rigorous in-depth evaluations that cover the UNEG Norms and Standards and explore the independence, credibility and utility of the function. They often also assess the performance of the function in delivering against its evaluation strategy or policy. Specific policy requirements for independent evaluation of the evaluation function are made in some UNEG evaluation policies (e.g. ILO).

#### ICU pros and cons

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ High level of independence— a strong approach for accountability purposes</li></ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ High level of independence enhances the credibility for member states and donors</li><li>▪ Do independent consultants have extensive knowledge of the UN to ensure credibility with senior managers? (Yes / No)</li></ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Useful feedback for the evaluation function, senior management member states and donors</li><li>▪ May provide less opportunity for active ‘peer engagement’ and staff learning within the evaluation function.</li></ul>

### ‘Standard’ UNEG Peer Reviews

Peer reviews aim to systematically assess the maturity of an evaluation function in terms of the three crucial UNEG criteria of independence, credibility and utility. Anchored in the UNEG Norms and Standards, the review is typically conducted by a four-person team. Members generally include a UNEG Head of Evaluation, an OECD / DAC Evaluation Network member, a senior evaluator from a UNEG member and a consultant. It is an assessment that focuses specifically on the evaluation function and with an assessment framework developed for that particular purpose.

Peer Reviews assess the extent to which the UN Norms and Standards for evaluation have been adopted and applied, and the extent to which an evaluation function contributes to accountability and learning in an organization. The Peer Review process can enhance knowledge about, confidence in, and use of evaluations by senior management and governing bodies, and lead to informed decisions about evaluation policy and practice. The Peer Review process can contribute to the professionalization of an evaluation practice through peer assessment, exchange and support.

## ICU pros and cons

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good level of independence, enhanced when EvalNet representatives serve on the Review Panel.</li> <li>▪ An independent consultant does much of the detailed analytical work to inform the panel.</li> <li>▪ Some stakeholders may perceive UN evaluation ‘peers’ and the Peer Panel to be less independent than external consultants in an independent evaluation.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation of EvalNet members brings a bilateral donor perspective and bolsters credibility</li> <li>▪ UN evaluation experts provide an in-depth understanding of UN contexts and Norms and Standards</li> <li>▪ The normative framework is broad in scope and (especially for large evaluation functions) this may limit the ‘depth’ of assessment given the available time and resources</li> <li>▪ Perceptions that UN ‘peers’ may offer a less critical assessment of the evaluation function may affect credibility</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowledge of UN settings can help in ensuring recommendations are appropriate</li> <li>▪ Peer Review can provide a good forum for ‘peer-to-peer’ learning among evaluation staff and the Peer Panel.</li> </ul>

PRs may not be a suitable modality for small evaluation functions due to:

- i) the ability of the evaluation function and the senior management to which it reports to receive a team and engage meaningfully, and
- ii) the cost of a Peer Review in the context of a limited evaluation budget.

### ‘Bundled’ (but separate) UNEG Peer–Reviews

As above, but the Peer Review Panel undertakes a review of more than one function. This modality was pursued for the Peer Reviews of UN Environment and UN-Habitat both co-located in Nairobi. The former being a medium-sized function of 5-9 staff members and latter being a small function of 2-4 staff members. The standard Peer Review approach was used. This approach delivered some cost savings.

**Benefits:** Travel costs and consultancy costs can be split across more than one function. A means by which a small function can benefit from a ‘normal’ Peer Review. If co-located, the governance function may be shared.

**Considerations:** A large volume of work for a Peer Panel to undertake in a short time. Requires more than one function to be co-located and wanting a Peer Review at the same moment in time.

External Strategic Review governed by a Steering Committee (UNEG Head and a bilateral donor) and with input from an external panel of evaluation experts.

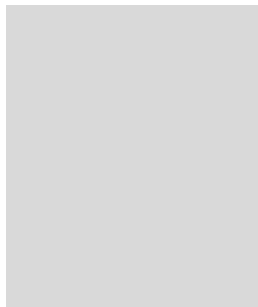
This modality was trialed by the Peer Review working in 2017-2018 for UNFPA. Because the modality used has not been approved through the UNEG AGM it is not formally considered a “UNEG Peer Review”.

The review was conducted to provide both an assessment of UNFPA’s evaluation policy and assurance on the soundness of the evaluation function in UNFPA as well as recommendations for improving them. The review was conducted taking into account UNEG Norms and Standards on independence, credibility, utility.

To bolster the independence of the review, a Steering Committee was constituted to provide independent oversight. The Steering Committee, chaired by the UNEG co-chair of the Task force on Peer Reviews of evaluation functions, and composed of a representative from the Evaluation Office of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the UNFPA Office of the Executive Director as ex-officio member, retained the services of an external professional Credentialed Evaluator with prior experience of UNEG Peer Reviews, to conduct this review.

An external technical advisory panel (ETAP) was also established to provide diverse geographical and institutional perspectives to the review. The ETAP was chaired by the former UNEG vice chair and Director of UNICEF Evaluation Office, and composed of the Deputy Executive Director, National Council for evaluation of Public Policies, Coneval, Mexico; the Director General, IEG and Vice-President, World Bank; the EvalYouth co-chair; the Governing Board Secretary, Asia Pacific Evaluation Association; and, the President, African Evaluation Association. The review covered the full scope of the evaluation function in UNFPA but with a relatively modest budget and a short time-frame.

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The independent consultant with experience of UNEG Peer Reviews undertook the detailed analytical work and prepared the report.</li> <li style="color: red;">The perceived independence of the review may be affected if consultant that has previously been engaged by the evaluation function is engaged for the review.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation of a bilateral donor perspective helped bolster credibility (although this was not formal EvalNet participation)</li> <li>▪ UN evaluation experts provided an in-depth understanding of UN contexts and Norms and Standards (on both the Steering Committee and the External Technical Advisory Panel), but their main engagement was in reviewing the draft report – without having studied the workings of the function or supporting documents in detail.</li> <li style="color: red;">▪ The normative framework is broad in scope and this limited the ‘depth’ of assessment given the available time and resources and the large volume of work to be covered in reviewing both the centralized and decentralized parts of the UNFPA evaluation function.</li> <li>▪ A consultant that had already undertaken UNEG Peer Reviews and prepared an analysis of lessons learned from UNEG Peer Reviews added credibility.</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowledge of UN settings can help in ensuring recommendations are appropriate.</li> </ul>



- Insufficient time limited the detail of the review, recommendations were very generalized and will need to be ‘unpacked’ through a process of in-house consultations. The consultative recommendation follow-up process may lead to good buy-in?
- There was limited ‘peer-to-peer’ learning among evaluation staff and the consultant (much less so for staff in the decentralized function) – and no real opportunity for Evaluation Staff to engage with the Steering Committee or the Advisory Panel members.

**Lessons: The process requires longer ‘lead times’ if the Steering Committee is to fully perform its role.**

## B. Possible approaches to assessing UN evaluation functions (for discussion).

UNEG Peer–Validated Self-Assessment/ with or without EvalNet participation

This modality is PROPOSED but has not yet been tested within UNEG.

A self-assessment against a normative framework responding to the UNEG norms and standards is prepared by the evaluation function. Collated evidence assessed by a small team including a senior UNEG member (that has already served on a full Peer Review panel) and a Senior EvalNet member (one of whom should be an evaluation ‘Head’). The team make a 3 or 4 day visit to the function, engage with evaluators and prepare a short ‘validation report’ that also makes a series of observations aimed at enhancing the evaluation function.

### ICU pros and cons

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited independence as it relies on information collated in a self-assessment; there may be a bias towards positive information being presented to the panel who will have limited time for verification or collation of additional omitted information.</li> <li>▪ The modality offers an independent viewpoint that goes beyond pure self-assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The views of evaluation experts from the UN and bilateral donor provide credibility to a ‘light’ exercise that is focused on improvement of the function.</li> <li>▪ There are limits to the detail of the assessment which may similarly limit credibility for accountability purposes compared to Peer Reviews / Independent Evaluations.</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides quick and, hopefully, useful feedback for the evaluation function for improvement purposes, raises the profile of the function with senior management member states and donors.</li> <li>▪ May provide some opportunity for active ‘peer engagement’ and staff learning within the evaluation function.</li> </ul>

- Provides limited accountability assurances for the evaluation function.

**Benefits:** Low cost –does not require a budget to support a consultant but may require some funds to allow for travel of peer reviewers. Places the main emphasis of the assessment on learning and improvement of the function and peer exchanges.

**Considerations:** The validation of findings by UNEG Peers will be limited by available time. The approach will depend heavily on thorough and diligent preparation by the function under assessment. Requires UNEG Peers and EvalNet members to volunteer staff time and, possibly, travel costs.

### UNEG–Validated Self-Assessment

This modality is PROPOSED but has not yet been tested within UNEG.

A self-assessment against a normative framework responding to the UNEG norms and standards is prepared by the evaluation function. Collated evidence is assessed by a ‘UNEG-approved/certified’ consultant. The consultant makes a 3 or 4 day visit to the function, engages with evaluation and other staff and prepare a short ‘validation report’ that also makes a series of observations aimed at enhancing the evaluation function.

#### ICU pros and cons

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not fully independent as it relies on information collated in a self-assessment, there may be a bias towards positive information being presented.</li> <li>▪ The consultant will have limited time for verification or collation of additional omitted information.</li> <li>▪ An external ‘UNEG ‘certified’ Consultant will bolster independence.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The views of a ‘UNEG-certified’ consultant expert familiar with the UN and the N&amp;S will provide credibility to a ‘light’ exercise focused on improvement of the function.</li> <li>▪ There are limits to the detail of the assessment which may similarly limit credibility for accountability purposes compared to Peer Reviews / Independent Evaluations.</li> <li>▪ The absence of EvalNet participation may further limit the credibility for accountability purposes in the eyes of donors and Member States.</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides quick and, hopefully, useful feedback for the evaluation function for improvement purposes, raises the profile of the function with senior management member states and donors</li> <li>▪ May provide some opportunity for active ‘peer engagement’ with the ‘UNEG-certified’ consultant expert to promote staff learning within the evaluation function.</li> <li>▪ Less useful for Member States from an accountability perspective.</li> </ul>

**Benefits:** Affordable. Places the main emphasis of the assessment on learning and improvement of the function and peer exchanges.

**Considerations:** The validation of findings by a ‘UNEG-approved/certified’ consultant will be limited by available time. The approach will depend heavily on thorough and diligent preparation by the function under assessment. Require About 10 working days for the consultant and travel costs.

### A publicly disclosed Self-Assessment against UNEG Norms and Standards

This modality is PROPOSED but has not yet been tested within UNEG.

In the early years of UNEG, Members were encouraged to complete a self-assessment rubric based on the Norms and Standards. These were sometimes collated by the Secretariat but never subject to any Peer scrutiny.

With this approach, a self-assessment against a framework aligned with the UNEG norms and standards is completed. Self-assessment responses would be supported by well-referenced sources of documentary evidence (ideally web links to documents). Findings would be publicly disclosed and could be subject to UNEG Peer assessment on request.

This modality has not yet been tested within UNEG but has been suggested. For discussion at the 2018 UNEG AGM.

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not at all independent as it a self-assessment, there may be a bias towards positive information being presented.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A well-prepared and evidenced self-assessment that is publicly disclosed may enhance the credibility for ‘un-reviewed’ functions.</li> <li>▪ May be a useful mechanism for ‘reviewed functions’ between more formal assessments.</li> <li>▪ Not sufficiently credible as a stand-alone exercise, but very useful input into all other evaluation function review/assessment modalities</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides quick and, hopefully, useful feedback for the evaluation function for improvement purposes for very minimal inputs.</li> <li>▪ Of limited use for Member States from an accountability perspective.</li> </ul>

Should such a self-assessment be mandatory? If so how often?

### C. Other Assessment Providers (where the UN evaluation functions are the ‘evaluand’)

Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) of the United Nations System. OIOS conducts a biennial assessment of evaluation functions located in the UN secretariat departments and entities. The objectives of the study are to describe and assess the status of evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat and to



identify the key issues emerging from a sample of evaluations. The assessment of evaluation functions focuses on the current capacity, quality and utility of the evaluation function of the Secretariat. The results are presented in the form of a “scorecard” based on 17 indicators of evaluation practice following the UNEG norms and standards. The approach relies on quantitative and qualitative assessments of key evaluation documents (such as evaluation policy, plans, and reports) web-based survey, complemented by in-person or telephone interviews with Secretariat focal points.

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent. Conducted externally of Secretariat evaluation functions by OIOS.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses a standard set of criteria driven by N&amp;S.</li> <li>Has a heavy reliance on document review – largely desk-based.</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides useful benchmarking for the evaluation functions against standard criteria and with respect to other Secretariat evaluation functions.</li> <li>Detailed feedback for each evaluation function is needed if areas of improvement are to be effectively acted upon.</li> </ul>

Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the United Nations System conducts both system wide reviews of different subject matters, and single entity assessment in the area of management and administration, which may cover evaluation functions or some aspects of it.

In 2013/2014, the JIU conducted its most comprehensive review of evaluation functions in the UN<sup>1</sup> with a view of contributing to the strengthening of the capacity of the evaluation functions of UN entities, and to enhance its role in enhancing the value of the UN. The study focused primarily on the corporate evaluation function and secondarily on the decentralized evaluation functions of the UN system. The relative performance of corporate evaluation functions was assessed against a “maturity matrix” that identified 5 areas and 66 indicators to benchmark against established standards endorsed by UNEG, JIU and development partners. The areas assessed were: a) the enabling environment; b) relevance, responsiveness, efficiency and adaptability; c) independence / impartiality; d) quality; e) utility; and f) relevance and readiness to support United Nations Organization and system-wide reforms. This assessment applied a highly formative approach based on the validation of self-assessments done by the 28 participating organizations of the JIU against documentary evidence, and interviews. The study is unlikely to be repeated.

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent. Conducted externally by the JIU.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses a standard set of criteria in a ‘maturity matrix’ driven by N&amp;S.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System. JIU/REP/2014/6

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has a heavy reliance on document review – largely desk-based.</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides useful benchmarking for the evaluation function against standard criteria and other JIU Participating member evaluation functions.</li> <li>▪ A one-off study, findings have time-limited relevance, unlikely to be repeated?</li> </ul>

The Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assesses the effectiveness of multilateral organizations that receive development and humanitarian funding. MOPAN assessments primarily provide a snapshot of four dimensions of organizational effectiveness (strategic management, operational management, relationship management and performance management). It has gradually moved to include a fifth dimension of assessment on development effectiveness. The MOPAN review assesses evaluation function under the dimension of performance management, under KPI 8: “Evidence-based planning and programming applied”. It examines structural independence, evaluation policy, coverage, quality of evaluation reports and stakeholder participation in evaluation process. The MOPAN assessment of multilateral organizations is based on information collected through a survey of key stakeholders, document review, and interviews with the staff of multilateral organizations.

<b>Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Independent. Conducted externally by bilateral donors that are part of the MOPAN.</li> </ul>
<b>Credibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Uses a standard set Key Performance Indicators.</li> <li>▪ Evaluation is but a small part of the organizational assessment – therefore the assessment of the evaluation function is rather ‘light’.</li> <li>▪ Has a heavy reliance on document review – largely desk-based.</li> </ul>
<b>Utility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides useful benchmarking for the evaluation function against standard criteria and other organizations recently assessed by MOPAN.</li> <li>▪ Can be useful to Member States and donors for accountability purposes.</li> <li>▪ Can raise important issues regarding the evaluation function for management attention.</li> </ul>