



# EVALUATION STANDARDS

for Latin America and the Caribbean



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This proposed set of evaluation standards is an initiative of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization (ReLAC) and the Project of Evaluation Capacity Development in Latin America (FOCEVAL), carried out by the Costa Rican Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN) and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval).

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FOCEVAL <http://foceval.org>  
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## Index

**Abstract** *(Page 3)*

### **Why develop Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean?** *(Page 5)*

Introduction *(Page 5)*

Scope and limitations of the Standards *(Page 5)*

Evaluation Standards target group for Latin America and the Caribbean *(Page 6)*

Field of application *(Page 6)*

Standard development process *(Page 6)*

A continuous process: the future development of Standards *(Page 7)*

### **Evaluation Standards Proposal for Latin America and the Caribbean** *(Page 9)*

Dimension 1: Rigorous evaluation *(Page 12)*

Dimension 2: Adequate evaluability *(Page 16)*

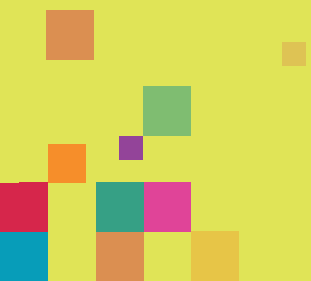
Dimension 3: Evaluation carried out according to ethical and legal principles *(Page 20)*

Dimensión 4: Adequate cultural understanding *(Page 24)*

Dimension 5: Relevance and utility *(Page 28)*

**Bibliography** *(Page 33)*

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## Abstract

During the years 2014 and 2015, the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization (ReLAC), together with the Evaluation Capacity Development Project (FOCEVAL) from the Costa Rican Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN) and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), promoted an inquiry process and meetings with experts in order to elaborate a document of evaluation standards. This document is an original creation, but it uses as references the evaluation standards currently used by evaluation associations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, Australasia and several international entities.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a growing demand for evaluation. However, this growing demand contrasts with incipient capacity development and limited professional resources; a complex reality characterized by social, cultural and linguistic diversity; and great gaps in well-being and resource access.

The creation of this document seeks to promote quality evaluation and capacity development and to apply principles and ethical criteria for good professional practice, taking into account the context diversity that characterizes this region. The aim is to contribute to the development of a common evaluation framework that provides guidance for obtaining high-quality evaluations, professional training and practice, facilitating communication between the actors, learning and knowledge production, and promoting an evaluation culture and social responsibility.

In this document, the standards are grouped into five key dimensions. Within each dimension, we define each standard in the briefest and most precise form possible.

The standards will be periodically reviewed in order to collect and incorporate recommendations and contributions that arise from experience with

their application. This is the first document to be placed at the service of professionals and institutions interested in the evaluation of development programs and projects.

*In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a growing demand for evaluation. However, this growing demand contrasts with incipient capacity development and limited professional resources; a complex reality characterized by social, cultural and linguistic diversity; and great gaps in well-being and resource access.*

*... the institutionalization of evaluation and the quality of its results are a relevant topic in Latin America, not only for the strengthening of their institutions and the quality of its policies, but also for the professional development of the evaluation field.*



# Why develop Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean?

## Introduction

Evaluation is gaining more importance and relevance in Latin America. In the last decades, and as a result of State reforms (among other processes), results-oriented public management models have been developed with more participation of the social actors in the public debate about the scope and the impact of the policies. This has resulted in a higher demand for evaluations, public availability of information, and expenditure accountability of programs and policies.

In a broad sense, evaluation is the systematic assessment process and critical analysis of one or more projects, programs, policies or another type of social action or intervention.

Evaluations apply reliable methodologies in order to (a) assess if the design and management of the interventions and the results obtained are consistent with what was expected, identifying the occurrence of unexpected changes; (b) assess if the procedures carried out are or were appropriate in order to produce the changes outlined in the objectives, or if they need to be adjusted; and (c) identify the contextual factors that affect the results and obtain elements and evidence that support an evaluative judgment.

Evaluation does not follow a unique method, nor is it the only input for decision-making by authorities. On the contrary, there has been diversification of many methodological strategies, the scope and the evaluation recipients. Their results deliver input for decision making, contribute to the learning of teams and organizations, and increase knowledge about the problems which are the objects of public policies. The evaluation users are the authorities, intermediate technicians, the mass media, civil organizations and the citizens in general.

In this framework, the institutionalization of evaluation and the quality of its results are a relevant topic in Latin America, not only for the strengthening of their institutions and the quality of its policies, but also for the professional development of the evaluation field.

## Scope and limitations of the Standards

The Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean described in this document will increase the quality and use of evaluations carried out by different actors of society. The standards establish a quality reference for the evaluations, so that they are reliable, useful, ethical and culturally appropriate. In this way, these standards are useful for both the people who carry out the evaluations and also for the people who hire, supervise or use their products.

The standards are statements which work as guidelines for action towards high quality evaluation. In order to be effective, the standards must be contextualized to the corresponding social, economic, cultural and institutional characteristics.

Having a common framework and agreement on the quality standards that an evaluation must meet will improve the terms of reference, the competence and rigor of the evaluator, the use and comparability of the results and the confidence of society in the evaluations. At the time, the standards also improve the interactions between the actors who provide, manage and execute the evaluations. These standards help create, an understandable and valid common language for those involved in these processes.

## Evaluation Standards target group for Latin America and the Caribbean

The standards encourage an evaluation culture in public and private institutions that, guides evaluators' practice and training and guarantees credibility, transparency, and comprehensiveness of evaluations. In order to fulfill these goals, cooperation from all the stakeholders involved in an evaluation is needed.

Therefore, this document is addressed to professionals and technicians who carry out, supervise and/or commission evaluations in different areas of the social, cultural and economic life of the society in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the same time, this document is also a reference framework for those who use evaluation results and for those involved in professional training.

## Field of application

The Evaluation Standards presented in this document were developed specifically for Latin America and the Caribbean, taking into account regional characteristics and demands.

Based on their general character, the standards are applicable in any institutional and organizational context, independently from the topic or object of evaluation (projects, programs, policies, institutions, products, or others). However, the standards aim at an "ideal" evaluation and, in practice, some of the standards may be more possible to be achieved than others, depending on the type of evaluation and/or the specific context.

## Standard development process

This Evaluation Standards Proposal for Latin America and the Caribbean is an initiative of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization (ReLAC) and the project of Evaluation Capacity Development in Latin America (FOCEVAL), carried out by the Cos-

ta Rican Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN) and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DE-val).

These standards have been developed by a Working Party of members who belong to the institutions taking part in this initiative, in collaboration with invited experts<sup>1</sup>.

The Working Party first studied the state of the art on the subject by reviewing the evaluation standards used in the main bodies of the United Nations and in associations and regional, national and global evaluation networks. The Working Party then surveyed a large number of evaluators, people in charge of programs, and academics who are referents on the subject and also reviewed the literature about the concepts of competence and standards<sup>2</sup>.

A preliminary set of standards was presented during the 4th ReLAC Conference (Lima, Peru, March 11th- 13th, 2015.) In this conference, progress was made in the discussion about conceptual aspects and in the identification of the essential and appropriate standards for the current context of Latin America and the Caribbean. Subsequently, the base document was presented in different regional and national events<sup>3</sup>.

A second set of standards was discussed during a virtual forum promoted by the Working Party,

<sup>1</sup> The experts consulted were: Patricia Mostajo and Eva Miranda (USAID, Peru); Carlos Rodríguez-Ariza (independent consultant, Spain), Ronny Muñoz (ACE, Costa Rica), Thomaz Chianca (independent consultante, Brazil), José Urquieta (Instituto de Salud Pública, Mexico), Gustavo Ángeles (USA), Reinhard Stockmann (universität des Saarlandes, Germany), Jean Quesnel (former director of evaluation at UNICEF, Canada), Michele Tarsilla (independent consultant, USA).

<sup>2</sup> All the base documentation is available in the ReLAC Evaluation Standards website. [www.noticiasrelac.ning.com](http://www.noticiasrelac.ning.com)

<sup>3</sup> During 2015, a preliminary document was presented in the following events: 10th REDLACME Conference, September, Panama; 4th Meeting of the Peruvian Network of Monitoring and Evaluation (PERUME), December, Peru; IDEAS Global Assembly, October, Thailand; Central American Meeting of Evaluation Networks, Nicaragua, December; and in national evaluators meetings taking place in Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico and Nicaragua.



taking place from July 13th to August 12th, 2015, with the participation of 90 evaluators from different Latin American countries. The forum contributions were extremely enriching and have influenced the final writing of this document.

Thus, a large evaluation community knew about, and had the opportunity to reflect on and make contributions to, these evaluation standards. We thank everyone involved for her or his contributions.

### A continuous process: the Standards future development

As in other similar experiences, the Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean will surely be the object of much discussion, and they will be refined and adjusted over time. During this process, the standards presented in this document will effectively guide the professional evaluation practice of our region.

ReLAC, as the regional evaluation network, will be in charge of promoting the use of these evaluation standards in the member countries. In particular, ReLAC will distribute this document to the different national networks and encourage it to be discussed in conferences, workshops, congresses, courses and virtual and on-site forums. ReLAC will also encourage academic programs to include this document in the curriculum of evaluation training programs and will develop training courses and workshops related to the subject in public institutions and their Monitoring and Evaluation bodies.



### STANDARD DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

*This section shows the evaluation standards grouped in five dimensions which are adapted to the region.*



## Evaluation Standards Proposal for Latin America and the Caribbean

The Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean was inspired by the work of other evaluation associations, organizations and regional and national networks (see Bibliography). Many of those entities developed their evaluation standards based on the dimensions defined in the *Program Evaluation Standards (PES)* from the *Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE)*: **utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy.**

These are the main references and antecedents which guided this Evaluation Standard Proposal for Latin America and the Caribbean, and that shall be acknowledged as an innovative experience in this subject. This section shows the evaluation standards grouped in five dimensions which are adapted to the region and presented in the following table:

<b>1. Rigorous evaluation</b>
1.1. Provide context for the evaluation
1.2. Detailed description of the object of evaluation
1.3. Relevant evaluation questions
1.4. Methodology validity and reliability
1.5. Adequate level of participation of the stakeholders involved
1.6. Relevant conclusions
1.7. Useful and feasible recommendations
1.8. Reports and effective public communication
<b>2. Adequate evaluability</b>
2.1. Effective evaluation management
2.2. Practical procedures
2.3. Contextual, social and political feasibility
2.4. Realistic
<b>3. Evaluation carried out according to ethical and legal principles</b>
3.1. Respect for rights of human subjects
3.2. Autonomy
3.3. Transparency
3.4. Legality
<b>4. Adequate cultural understanding</b>
4.1. Equality and equity
4.2. Cultural rights
4.3. Reciprocity and cultural identities
<b>5. Relevance and utility</b>
5.1. Effective participation
5.2. Mutually agreed purposes
5.3. Explicit values
5.4. Relevant, suitable and appropriate information
5.5. Useful results
5.6. Appropriate and timely communication and reports
5.7. Interest in the consequences and effects

Table 1: Dimensions and Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean.

DIMENSION 1

*Rigorous  
evaluation*

DIMENSION 2

*Adequate  
evaluability*

DIMENSION 3

*Evaluation carried out according to  
ethical and legal principles*

DIMENSION 4

*Adequate cultural  
understanding*

DIMENSION 5

*Relevance  
and utility*

# Definitions of Dimensions and Standards



## DIMENSION 1

### *Rigorous evaluation*

A rigorous methodology allows evaluators to determine the observed facts, which are subject of analysis, with accuracy and precision and to document evidence of the statements presented in the evaluation report.

The standards included in this dimension must guarantee that the evaluation is contextualized, that it is valid, and that it employs a methodology of rigorous design, planning and execution, quality oriented with techniques and tools appropriate to data collection, analysis and interpretation. A quality evaluation must convey accurate results and offer, in a timely manner, useful propositions, conclusions and recommendations for decision-making.

STANDARDS

1.1 *Provide context for the evaluation*

1.2 *Detailed description  
of the object of evaluation*

1.3 *Relevant evaluation questions*

1.4 *Methodology validity and reliability*

1.5 *Adequate level of participation of  
the stakeholders involved*

1.6 *Relevant conclusions*

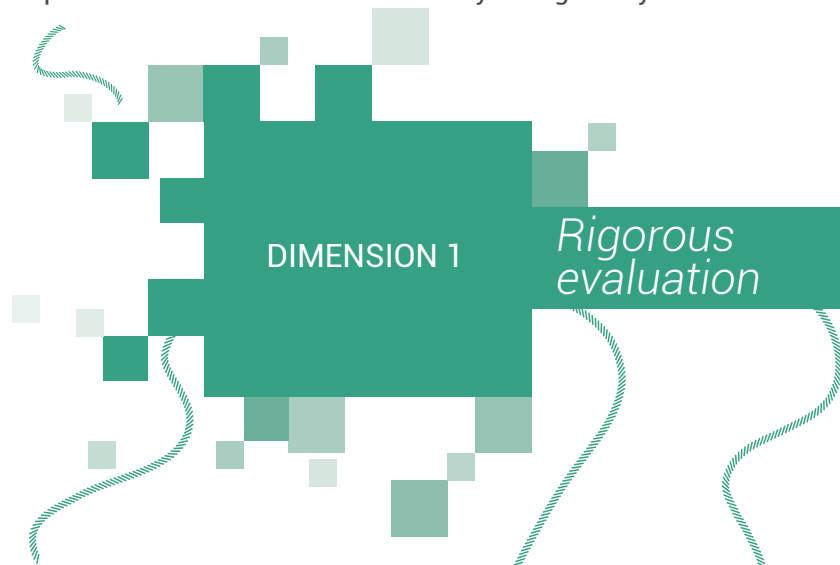
1.7 *Useful and feasible recommendations*

1.8 *Reports and effective  
public communication*

1.1

## *Provide context for the evaluation*

The evaluation must set out clearly the problem(s) which the program or project to be evaluated aims to reduce or eliminate. This means characterizing and understanding not only the social, cultural, political and economic context in a detailed manner, but also the external factors that have an effect on that intervention. This contextualization also means understanding the local or regional criteria in terms of evaluation demand, the information needs with respect to the evaluated object, and the institutional regulations in terms of accountability, transparency, and the evaluation approach. These aspects, among others, shall adapt and situate the evaluation locally or regionally.



1.2

### *Detailed description of the object of evaluation*

The actions, products and purposes of the evaluated object must be clearly and amply detailed, as well as the theory of change which defines how success will be achieved.

1.3

### *Relevant evaluation questions*

The evaluation purposes and questions to be answered must be described in detail so that they are clear and relevant for the main stakeholders of the evaluation.

1.4

### *Methodology validity and reliability*

The evaluation design (including the data collection procedures and analysis techniques) must be appropriate for the evaluation purposes, as well as rigorous in the production and elaboration of evaluation results.



1.5

### ***Adequate level of participation of the stakeholders involved***

The opinions of the main stakeholders involved in the problem or intervention must be considered in the design and execution of the evaluation. The adequate participation of stakeholders who are for and against the processes and/or results of the evaluated intervention must be ensured.

This involves recognizing and reflecting the different perspectives, and giving credit respectively, with the required confidentiality, to all people who significantly contribute to the evaluation.

1.6

### ***Relevant conclusions***

The evaluation conclusions must be clear and completely documented, derived from the findings and guided by the evaluation questions originally posed. They must be consistent with the purposes of the evaluation.

1.8

### ***Reports and effective public communication***

Communication of evaluation results should be accurate and convenient, avoiding biases, distortions or mistakes in interpretation. The evaluator must clearly express which are the scopes and limitations of the evidence he or she is supplying in order to support his or her assessments, presenting an adequate delimitation of the context in which they are applicable.

The evaluation must communicate the results through a report or account of public access, giving special attention to returning and delivering information to the involved stakeholders.

The evaluation report must be opened to public scrutiny as well as discussion and feedback from peers and external agents, unless there exists a justified confidentiality criterion previously agreed upon.

1.7

### ***Useful and feasible recommendations***

Recommendations must be based on the results. The evaluation must offer useful and feasible improvement recommendations, ideally with high probability of being implemented. To achieve that, high levels of participation of the stakeholders must be obtained, so that the recommendations have a practical sense for the population.

## DIMENSION 2

### *Adequate evaluability*

This dimension must be considered during the design phase of the evaluation, since its object is to guarantee that the evaluation is realistic, cautious, appropriate, and aware of the costs it involves. Before the evaluation development, it must be determined if the object to be evaluated has been adequately defined, and if the proposed methodology and instruments will produce sufficient, verifiable evidence to answer the evaluation questions posed.

Before starting the evaluation, it is necessary to determine and guarantee a degree of relevance, opportunity, measurability, independence and accessibility to information sources. It is necessary to reach a balance between coverage, complexity and evaluative resources. The limitations of the evaluation must be clearly recognized and any proposed solutions clearly set out.

The standards included in this dimension seek to determine if it is worthwhile to carry out an evaluation under the current conditions, focusing on effectiveness, efficiency and the usefulness of the evaluation.



STANDARDS

2.1

*Effective evaluation management*

2.2

*Practical procedures*

2.3

*Contextual, social and political feasibility*

2.4

*Realistic*

2.1

### ***Effective evaluation management***

The evaluation should be guided by efficient and effective management strategies. The evaluation should use the assigned resources in an efficient and transparent way.



2.2

### ***Practical procedures***

The evaluation procedures should be practical and relevant to the way in which the object to be evaluated operates.

A decorative graphic consisting of a red wavy line that starts from the left, loops upwards and to the right, then loops downwards and to the right, ending near a small cluster of red squares of varying sizes.

2.3

### ***Contextual, social and political feasibility***

The evaluations should recognize and analyze the cultural and political interests at stake, as well as the needs of particular individuals and groups.

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2.4

### ***Realistic***

For its correct development, a realistic evaluation guarantees a clear coherence between the financial, human and temporary resources. Moreover, the availability and accessibility of the verification sources and other needed information should be known in advance.

### DIMENSION 3

### *Evaluation carried out according to ethical and legal principles*

This dimension ensures that the evaluation process is transparent and legitimate, guaranteeing recognition and respect for the rights and responsibilities of those who participate. It also guarantees that all procedures during the evaluation do not adversely affect the rights and integrity of the participants, who may be members of an institution or part of a distinct community.

STANDARDS

3.1

*Respect for rights  
of human subjects*

3.2

*Autonomy*

3.3

*Transparency*

3.4

*Legality*

3.1

### ***Respect for rights of human subjects***

The evaluation and its procedures should respect the rights of the people who provide information confidentially. This entails being sensitive to their beliefs and customs, preserving the dignity of people who participate in the object of evaluation, whether as executors or beneficiaries. In accordance with the regulations and institutional structure in effect, the evaluation should guarantee the informed consent of participants, as well as information safeguarding and confidentiality.



### ***Autonomy***

The role of evaluation is independent from any other roles in the institutions. The evaluator should work autonomously; he or she should not be involved in any political or organizational instances which could affect the neutrality and transparency of the evaluative processes.





3.3

### *Transparency*

In principle, evaluations should be public documents. The terms of reference and reports should be available to stakeholders and to the public, unless there exists a justified need for confidentiality.

3.4

### *Legality*

Evaluation activities should be supported by a formal instrument, signed by the stakeholders and specifying the agreed upon scope of the evaluation, duration of the study, cost, the expected product or products obtained, obligations between the stakeholders, the evaluation intellectual and material property rights, publishing rights, and the safeguarding of undisclosed information and data confidentiality.

#### DIMENSION 4

#### *Adequate cultural understanding*

The evaluation should respect language, cultural codes and senses of the population affected by the evaluation. The evaluation processes should be sensitive to the different historical and cultural contexts, expressing good communication terms and empathy with the culture and the people involved.



	4.1	<i>Equality and equity</i>
	4.2	<i>Cultural rights</i>
STANDARDS	4.3	<i>Reciprocity and cultural identities</i>

4.1

### *Equality and equity*

The evaluation should guarantee a good interpersonal relationship and the inclusion of all people involved, appreciating them and leaving aside their rank of authority, social, economic and/or cultural standing, thus contributing to tolerance and equity among them.



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4.2

### *Cultural rights*

The evaluations should respect the cultural identity and dignity of the communities involved in the evaluation, following the appropriate protocols when addressing sensitive subjects that may cause harm to the communities, groups or cultures of origin. If requested, the evaluation protocol should be approved by any ethics committee which has been established for these purposes.

4.3

### *Reciprocity and cultural identities*

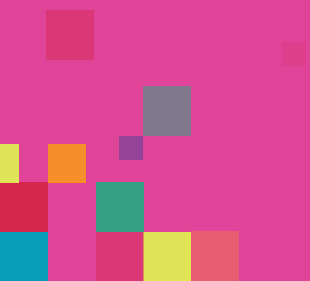
In most of the peoples and ethnicities in Latin America, reciprocity and equality in social exchanges and relations are values which contribute to cooperation, trust and social cohesion. The evaluations should preserve trust and reciprocity among participants, not favoring the interest or perspective of one group over another. This involves respecting values, ways of thinking and knowledge of the communities.

## DIMENSION 5

### *Relevance and utility*

Relevance and utility guarantee that evaluations meet the information and knowledge needs of the users and all other stakeholders. The evaluations should be relevant, convenient and practical, in order to contribute efficiently to decision-making, accountability, and public deliberation.

The standards in this dimension increase the probability that participants appreciate the evaluation processes and products and consider them as satisfying their needs. In this dimension, the main objective is for evaluation to be convenient and practical, in order to provide useful suggestions to improve programming, decision-making, and contributing to the knowledge development for its global use in different contexts and situations.



	5.1	<i>Effective participation</i>
	5.2	<i>Mutually agreed purposes</i>
	5.3	<i>Explicit values</i>
	5.4	<i>Relevant, suitable and appropriate information</i>
	5.5	<i>Useful results</i>
STANDARDS	5.6	<i>Appropriate and timely communication and reports</i>
	5.7	<i>Interest in the consequences and effects</i>

5.1

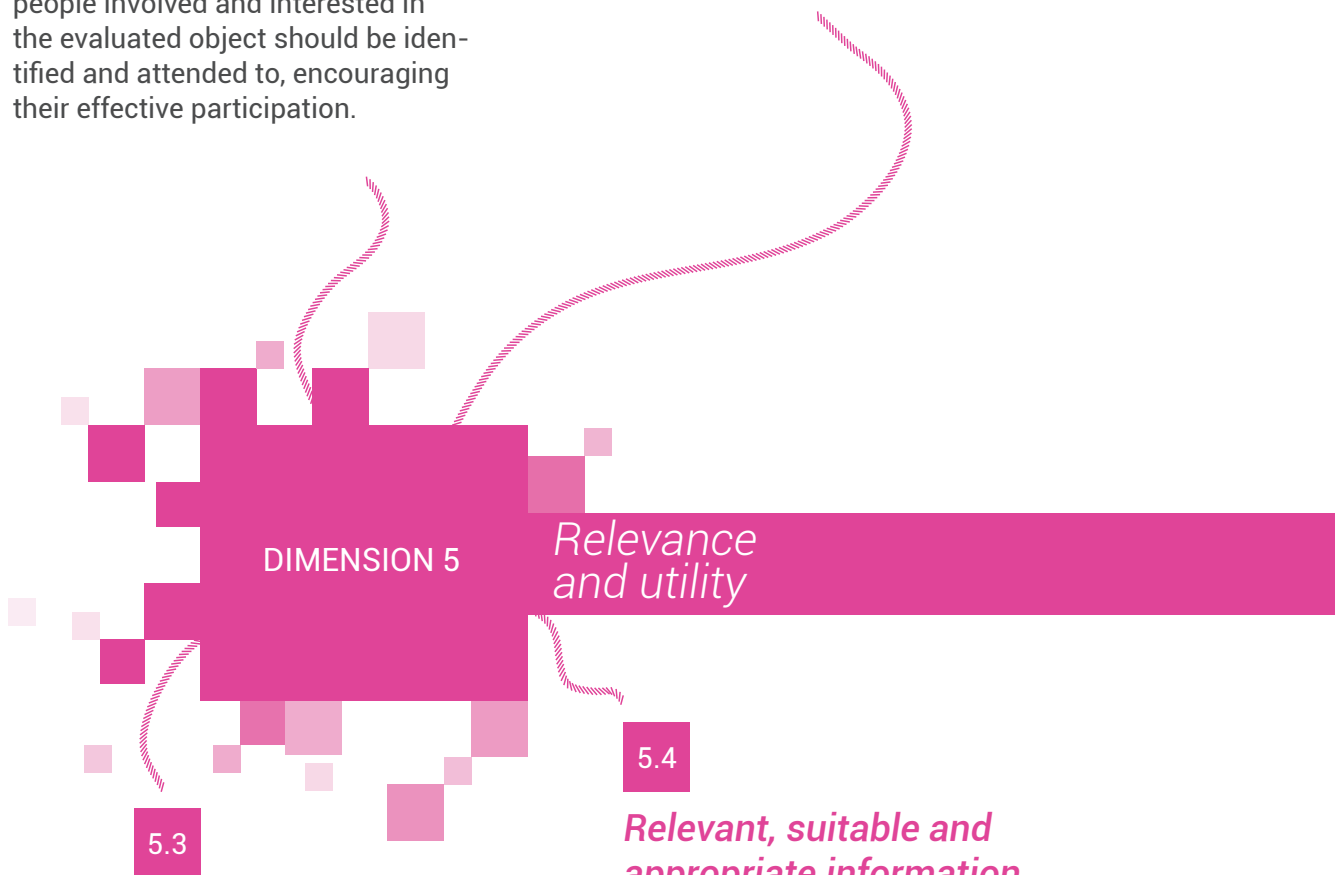
### *Effective participation*

The evaluation should consider, not only in its design but also in its execution, the perspectives of different actors. Therefore, all the groups of people involved and interested in the evaluated object should be identified and attended to, encouraging their effective participation.

5.2

### *Mutually agreed purposes*

The evaluation purposes should be explicit and clearly documented and accepted. The evaluator should clarify the definition when the purposes are confusing or expressed in vague terms.



5.3

### *Explicit values*

When appropriate, the evaluations should make explicit which axiological bases the judgments and points of view the evaluators will rely upon.

5.4

### *Relevant, suitable and appropriate information*

The evaluation should be useful to the needs of stakeholders, the identified stakeholders and the stakeholders emerging during the evaluation process. Their results should be available to them at the time they are required.



5.5

### ***Useful results***

The evaluations should produce descriptions and judgments which encourage and help the participants to rediscover, reinterpret, or review their perception, attitude and/or behavior towards the object of evaluation. The results should be useful for people who make decisions, the benefited public, and any other people interested in the evaluated intervention.

5.6

### ***Appropriate and timely communication and reports***

The evaluations should respond to information needs of its multiple audiences in a suitably clear and timely manner. Communication is a relevant dimension which starts on the first day of evaluation and continues throughout the final stage of disseminating results.

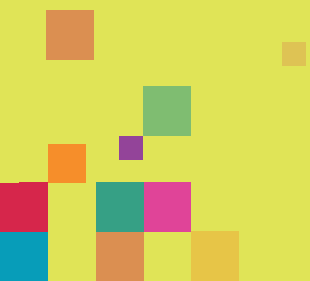
5.7

### ***Interest in the consequences and effects***

Evaluations should improve projects, programs and policies, in order to help improve the quality of life of all people, including by encouraging the responsible and appropriate use of results.

If potentially illegal acts are found during the evaluation that could risk the people involved in the evaluation or in the program, the evaluator should act with legal and ethical responsibility in order to minimize the possible negative effects.

*As in other similar experiences, the Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean will surely be the object of much discussion, and they will be refined and adjusted over time. During this process, the standards presented in this document will effectively guide the professional evaluation practice of our region.*



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# EVALUATION STANDARDS

for Latin America and the Caribbean

The creation of this document seeks to promote quality evaluation and capacity development and to apply principles and ethical criteria for good professional practice, taking into account the context diversity that characterizes this region. The aim is to contribute to the development of a common evaluation framework that provides guidance for obtaining high-quality evaluations, professional training and practice, facilitating communication between the actors, learning and knowledge production, and promoting an evaluation culture and social responsibility.

In this document, the standards are grouped into five key dimensions. Within each dimension, we define each standard in the briefest and most precise form possible.



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