

NRC EVALUATION POLICY



NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION



The evaluation policy clarifies why, how and when NRC uses evaluations. It also outlines standards for conduct and sets out how evaluations contribute to organisational learning and accountability.

Who is the policy for?

The policy's primary audience is NRC staff involved in commissioning, planning or using evaluations. Secondary audiences are the people affected by displacement whom NRC aims to assist plus NRC's donors, partners and other stakeholders.

NRC values

This policy is informed by NRC's protocols, core values and the humanitarian standards to which it ascribes (such as the Code of Conduct for the Red Cross, Sphere Standards and the planned Core Humanitarian Standard). In particular, it draws on existing commitments to evaluation, learning and accountability.

OUR VISION:

**Rights Respected
People Protected**

Our Mission Statement:

NRC works to protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons during crisis.

Through our programmes we provide assistance to meet immediate humanitarian needs, prevent further displacement and contribute to durable solutions. Through our stand-by rosters we provide expertise as a strategic partner to the UN, as well as to national and international actors. Through our advocacy we strive for rights to be upheld and for lasting solutions to be achieved.

We take action during situations of armed conflict, and engage in other contexts where our competencies will add value. We are a rights-based organisation and are committed to the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. ¹

WHAT IS EVALUATION IN NRC?

NRC has adopted the ALNAP definition of the evaluation of humanitarian action:

Evaluation of humanitarian action is a systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability.

Why evaluate?

The purpose of evaluation in NRC is to:

1. Enhance NRC's **accountability** to its target groups and donors by regularly examining performance and adapting NRC's responses on the basis of the findings.
2. Use the findings to immediately bring about **changes and improvements** in practice.
3. Strengthen agency-wide **learning** by drawing on evaluations to improve organisational approaches, strategy and policy.



Who are evaluations for?

The **primary concern** of all NRC evaluations is the impact of NRC's work on people affected by displacement, even when the evaluation relates to projects that do not have a direct impact on displaced people.

The primary **evaluation users** are the people who directly use the learning and recommendations to adapt their work or make key decisions.

Stakeholders are the people who have a stake in the programme being evaluated: they include partners, donors, local authorities, the humanitarian sector, UN agencies and affected populations. The evaluation should identify the main stakeholders and how they should be included in the evaluation process.

The main **audience** for evaluations are the people interested in knowing about the findings, such as managers and staff working on similar programmes, or secondees.

EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

As a humanitarian agency working with people affected by displacement, NRC is faced with a number of challenges when undertaking evaluations. This includes working with people who have been displaced multiple times and who may have experienced traumatic events; rapidly changing contexts; access challenges; dealing with new emergencies; and high staff turnover. These challenges require an evaluation policy that promotes the principles set out below.

Appropriateness

NRC conducts evaluations when appropriate given the size, scale and capacity of the agency to manage them and follow them up. NRC focuses on evaluations with the biggest potential impact on its work on behalf of displaced people. NRC uses a justifiable approach and budget given the nature and purpose of the evaluation.

Flexibility

NRC's evaluations should be responsive to emerging needs, access and other humanitarian challenges.

Transparency

NRC should be transparent about evaluation results, fully informing NRC staff, people affected by displacement, donors, partners and the public.

Participation

NRC seeks the views of displaced communities in an ethical manner and adapts programmes or makes decisions based on this feedback.



DECIDING WHAT TO EVALUATE

NRC prioritises evaluations on the basis of relevancy – evaluating the right things at the right time.

What should NRC evaluate?

NRC can evaluate organisation-wide themes, strategies, policies, single projects, programmes, country offices or regional strategies.

As NRC is a humanitarian agency, one of the primary functions of the evaluation process is accountability to affected populations. While management reviews, audits, systems and strategic planning monitor NRC's internal operational performance, our evaluations should focus on areas that will provide the greatest accountability to people affected by displacement. This primarily includes field operations, emergency deployments plus advocacy and policy work, but could also include other programmatic areas within NRC when relevant. The cross-departmental coverage should be proportionate and appropriate to the funding and human resources available, and its direct impact on people affected by displacement.

Annual prioritisation

NRC prioritises evaluations on the basis of relevancy – evaluating the right things at the right time. It does so through an annual evaluation plan.

Each NRC department is responsible for prioritising, managing, resourcing and following up on evaluations to ensure that the minimum standards are achieved:

Minimum requirements

Head office

Within each three-year strategy cycle, at least one external and one internal evaluation of a **global advocacy priority** and of **NRC's rosters** is commissioned.

In addition, the field operations department should ensure the following evaluations take place:

- Programme strategy assessment: research into one of NRC's global technical priorities (annually)
- Emergency response reviews

Country office

All country offices should ensure that at least one external evaluation is commissioned within a three-year cycle, focusing on the areas outlined in this policy (see table, page 7). Country offices should also undertake regular internal reviews.

External evaluations should be approved at the regional level to enable cross-cutting issues to be jointly evaluated.

The aggregated annual evaluation plan should be reviewed by the FO management team every year.

Flexibility and donor requirements

The annual plan should be flexible and respond to new requests from donors or other triggers.

Staff should check with NRC donor advisors for donor-specific requirements and guidelines.

EVALUATION TYPES IN NRC

NRC has developed an evaluation framework with a number of categories. The evaluation type should be based on the purpose and use of the evaluation, its budget and the degree of independence required.

What?	Description	When should we use this?
Reviews (internal staff)	<p>After Action Reviews (AAR) offer a lighter-touch alternative to evaluations. They reflect on how a response or project operated, where it succeeded and the important challenges faced. An AAR creates a space to interpret and reflect on monitoring and evaluation data.</p> <p>Emergency Response Reviews are light-touch, fast evaluations that focus on identifying areas for immediate improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of the project cycle • Following emergency scale-up or initial response (usually during the first four months of NRC's response)
Evaluations (external or mixed team)	<p>A more formal exercise that focuses on the impact, relevance, efficiency and connectedness of an advocacy priority, programme, country mission or departmental work. The goal is to inform strategy and share the lessons learned.</p> <p>This can include mid-term, end-of-programme and impact evaluations.</p>	<p>NRC should avoid single project evaluations and instead focus on a total country response*, a thematic area or a programmatic area. NRC should focus on evaluations with strong potential to improve its work on behalf of displaced people, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A country office's most expensive or longest-running programmes • Innovative approaches and emerging areas that NRC can learn from globally • Global advocacy priorities • Emerging thematic areas for our rosters • Informing the revision of a programme strategy • When there is substantial learning on impact or good practice that should be shared globally • When a donor requires an evaluation (aim to include costs for evaluating the whole programme rather than single projects)
Studies (usually external)	<p>Programme strategy assessments (global) investigate strategic questions of growing importance in the humanitarian sector and identify replicable and scalable programme models.</p> <p>Project studies (country office) require a more rigorous approach to data collection and analysis than is typical of most humanitarian M+E. They often resemble programme research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned for annually by the core competency section • Consideration of questions raised by GORS reporting and discussions of programme policy and design issues

*Can include rosters and advocacy when relevant.

MAKING EVALUATIONS USEFUL

Evaluation findings should be relevant and useful in order to improve NRC's work on behalf of people affected by displacement. To achieve this, NRC should:

Evaluate at the right time

Evaluations should be planned so that the findings are available before decisions are made about new strategies or programmes. NRC recognises the value of both formative evaluations (that inform the next phase of a programme) and summative evaluations (which take place at the end of a programme).

NRC should avoid waiting to evaluate until the exit phase, as the impact of the findings on future programming will be limited.

When to evaluate?

Start up: To identify and adjust major challenges immediately

Implementation: To generate learning that will improve programmes

Exit phase: To be accountable for performance, assess longer-term impact or feed into institutional learning

Involve the right people

The manager who commissions the evaluation should appoint a steering committee chairperson. This person should then undertake stakeholder mapping to identify steering committee members. NRC management should ensure that the members have the space to learn throughout the evaluation process. Intended users should be directly engaged by the steering committee. The evaluation advisor can smooth the process by providing tools, guidelines and quality support (and managing external evaluators in selected cases).

Engaging people affected by displacement

NRC ensures that targeted beneficiaries are included in the evaluation process and receive feedback about the findings.

Ask the right questions

NRC starts the evaluation design by defining the specific purpose and questions. It is primarily interested in the following areas:

- The impact of NRC's work, especially on the lives of displaced communities
- Using the theory of change to form questions
- Performance against humanitarian standards such as the OECD DAC criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, co-ordination, coherence, connectedness, impact)
- Identifying what doesn't work and what needs to be adapted
- Protection, accountability, advocacy, durable solutions and gender
- Value for money

NRC also identifies a strategic question annually that must be included in all external evaluations (for example, cross-cutting or ongoing issues, or strategic priorities).

EVALUATION QUALITY

Quality standards in evaluation practice need to be followed to ensure that evaluation findings are useful to NRC. This involves ensuring the following quality factors in the evaluation process:

Using appropriate methods

NRC should select methods relevant to the evaluation purpose, focus and intended use. NRC also requires high-quality data collection and analysis, including triangulation. Evaluation quality should be checked during the inception phase and final report.

Ensuring the right people are in place

All evaluation TORs should set out the specific skills and experience required to conduct the process. NRC promotes internal, mixed-team and external evaluations: factors influencing its choices include the relative importance and relevance of different types of expertise, whether an external perspective is required and the level of independence. Evaluation teams should be gender-balanced and culturally diverse in composition.

A roster will be established to enable NRC staff to engage in evaluation activities. Management should encourage the participation of national and international staff.

Independence and neutrality

Minimizing bias is a goal in all evaluations. This is achieved through the steering committee set-up (which always includes people external to the programme being considered) and team composition (external evaluators or staff not involved with the programme being evaluated).

Validating findings

All external evaluations should hold a validation and feedback meeting with the primary evaluation users and other important stakeholders. This is to ensure that these key individuals have the opportunity to comment on the findings, relevance, learning and utility of the draft findings.

Ethics

NRC evaluations should:

- Do no harm to informants and stakeholders
- Protect confidentiality
- Be alert to the power dynamics in affected populations
- Ensure gender balance and representation
- Include informed consent
- Follow international standards when interviewing children and GBV survivors
- Focus on evaluation questions and avoid distressing people (for example, do not ask them to relive traumatic events)

USING EVALUATIONS

NRC uses evaluation findings to ensure that they lead to improvements in the quality and impact of its work. This is achieved through:

Management response

Within one month of receiving a final evaluation report, the manager responsible for the work under review should ensure that NRC's management response procedures are followed, including producing a management response action plan. Managers critically review evaluations and prioritise what needs to be done. The responses should be approved by departmental directors or in the case of country-specific programme evaluations, by the head of region/regional director. Each department is responsible for ensuring that recommendations inform new policies, projects, strategies or plans of action. The implementation of management responses is regularly tracked and reviewed by the relevant line manager until this is no longer deemed necessary.

Communicating and disseminating findings

Evaluation steering committees develop and implement a communication plan that includes the target audience, key messages, timing and channels of delivery, desired outcomes and who performs each task.

NRC evaluations are available on the intranet or upon request from NRC's evaluation advisor.

Evaluation and the project cycle

Evaluations should be considered at the design phase of any new strategy, programme or pilot. When approved, resourcing should be considered during project formulation and requested from donors. Evaluations can take place during implementation or at the final phase of the project cycle. Learning from evaluations should be reviewed at the beginning of the response cycle.



ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

NRC promotes continuous learning from our experiences to better protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons during crisis. Learning from evaluations should feed into organizational development and strategies.

Leadership

NRC's management team should support evaluations and ensure that they are used continuously to reflect, learn, improve and hold people accountable for actions taken, resources spent and results achieved. Evaluation findings should be openly discussed, including critical elements and evidence of failure.

In the case of strategically important evaluations, the management response should be prepared by the manager in charge at NRC HO and presented to the Senior Management Group. The SMG may require periodic updates on the progress of management responses for strategically important evaluations.

Annual learning review

NRC conducts an Annual Learning Review that brings together insights gained from across its evaluation activities. A prioritised learning question is identified every year and included in all NRC evaluations.

Feed learning into strategic processes

Learning from evaluations informs strategic processes and the revision and development of key organisational policies, handbooks and guidelines. This includes NRC's departmental, regional, national, global and other strategic processes.

NRC also considers lessons learned from evaluations at the beginning of the response cycle. This includes starting up new country programmes or global initiatives.

Sharing evaluations externally

External evaluations should be published online and shared with other relevant actors in the humanitarian sector. If evaluations contain learning which is of importance to external actors, print copies should be produced.

Exceptions may occur if there is a direct risk posed to a project participant, NRC staff member or to NRC's capacity to continue operating in-country. These exceptions should be stated in writing and approved by the relevant departmental director. In these cases, NRC will produce an edited version for external consumption.

NRC posts evaluations on evaluation forums such as ALNAP. They should also be shared with relevant external networks, bodies and donors.

Please see NRC's Evaluation Handbook and M+E Modules (six and seven) for the procedures, guidelines and tools needed to implement this policy.



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