

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE AUDIT

2023

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INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of public policies and programmes has recently become a priority on the agendas of public entities. In many European countries, there is a variety of actors at the state, regional, or local level advocating for and/or participating in evaluation processes. However, there is no consensus on methodological and performance aspects. Nevertheless, the debate about the need to institutionalize evaluation and establish a framework regulating its practice is not new. Despite this, it was not until December 2022 that Law 27/2022 was approved in Spain, institutionalizing the evaluation of public policies in the General State Administration. This law establishes a national legal framework aimed at promoting a public evaluation culture, improving the quality of public policies, and achieving the efficient development of the evaluation of the outcomes of public interventions.

On the other hand, some Supreme and Regional Audit Institutions have initiated efforts, within their mandates, to enhance their audit practices. This includes incorporating ex-post evaluation of public programmes and policies, expanding and complementing their activities conducted through performance or management audits. This initiative stems from the understanding that evaluation, as a tool, will facilitate a better understanding of public policies, enabling them to identify objectives, comprehend their implementation, and ultimately, better explain their success or failure.

In the field of External Control Institutions, albeit gradually, there has been a shift from an approach almost exclusively focused on the financial and legal regularity of public activities toward an increasing presence of performance audits. This change is reflected in the weight of these types of actions in their annual programmes. Numerous audits by Control Bodies have focused on analysing compliance with the principles of effectiveness, efficiency, and economy, an assessment that aligns with evaluating a programme or public policy. In this regard, we believe that, whenever these audits or reviews analyse not just a public entity and its procedures but rather an action derived from a programme or public policy, in the audit planning phase it can be considered whether or not it is possible to adopt an evaluation approach, adding value to the audit procedure.

In this context, we are convinced that the methodological process followed by performance audits can be complemented and strengthened by incorporating some evaluation criteria. These criteria include coherence, relevance, orientation to results and impacts, as well as focusing more attention on stakeholders or interested parties.

Undoubtedly, human and institutional resources constitute a key element in advancing any implementation strategy of the evaluative approach in performance audits. The current professional profile of staff dedicated to external control tasks is highly focused on legal and economic-financial areas. However, an approach linked to a vision closer to evaluation requires a more interdisciplinary professional profile. Therefore, it is essential to clearly invest in the enhancement of both staff training and qualification from this perspective.

In this regard, we want to highlight the training programme developed jointly, in various editions, by the Association of External Audit Bodies (ASOCEX), the Spanish Court of Audit, the Fiscal Studies Institute of the Ministry of Finance (IEF), and the National Institute of Public Administration (INAP) concerning the evaluation of public policies and programmes. This programme, mainly aimed at auditors from External Audit Bodies and the Court of Audit, aims to promote knowledge about evaluation, its various methodologies, technical approaches, and tools. It also provides practical experience accumulated by Spanish entities and organisms as well as those in the European context.

In this context, this Guide aims to be an initial approach to incorporating evaluation elements into performance audits from a transversal and complementary perspective of both tools. The document, which is intended to be open and dynamic, can be updated and completed once performance audits with an evaluative approach become more widespread in Control Institutions. This update can include best practices, featuring relevant cases and experiences from reports prepared from this performance audit perspective.

Finally, considering that the Guide's objective is to be useful to audit teams wishing to apply the evaluative approach in conducting performance audits, we suggest citing it in the following manner:

Garde-Roca, J.A.; Genaro-Moya, M.D.; and López-Hernández, A.M. (Ed.) (2023): *Methodological Guide for the Application of the Evaluative Approach to Performance Audits*, Ed. Fundación Ortega y Gasset, Madrid.

1. FROM PERFORMANCE AUDIT TO PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION

1.1. DIFFERENCES AND ANALOGIES BETWEEN PERFORMANCE AUDIT AND PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION

As is well known, the objective of performance audit is to evaluate the economic and financial management of public expenditure, from the perspective of the principles of good management: economy, efficiency, or effectiveness (the three Es), thus contributing to the improvement of this management.

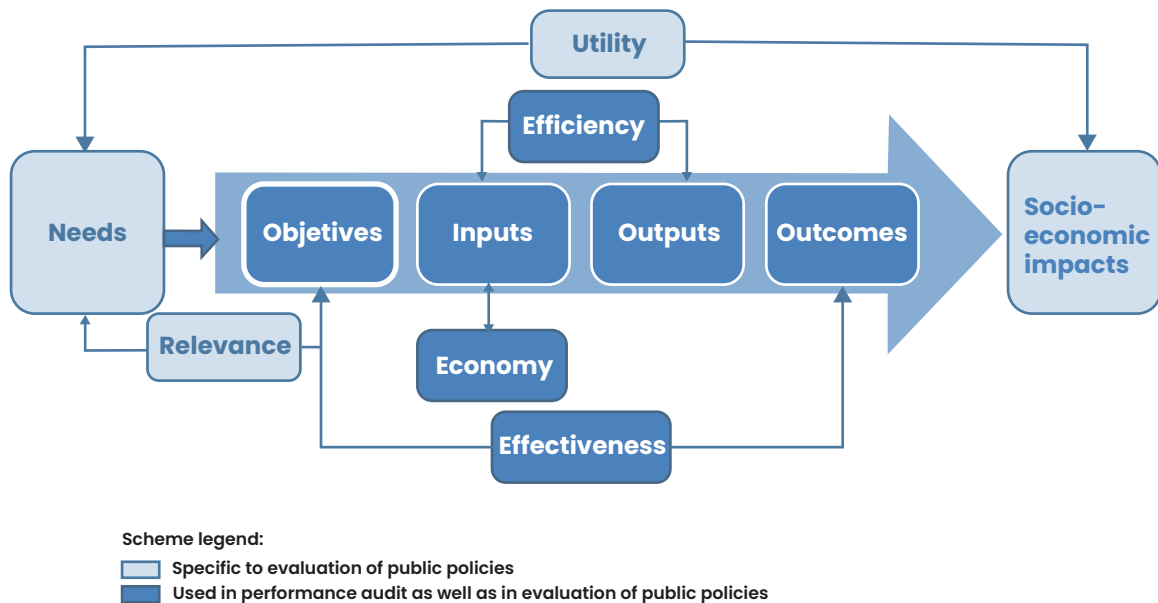
Comparing the content of performance audit with the broader scope of an evaluation, configuring their processes homogeneously and projecting them through the main criteria used in their respective value chains, as done in *INTOSAI GUID 9020: Public Policy Evaluation* (international Organization of supreme Audit Institutions-*INTOSAI 2019a*), the main differences could be (**Figure 1**):

- While in performance audit, the objective is the evaluation of the three Es in terms of results (considered as immediate or direct effects and short-term effects), in public policy evaluation, the fundamental aspect is to analyse whether the policy or programme meets existing needs and achieves appropriate impacts (understood as delayed effects or effects occurring in the medium or long term, often involving consideration of other policies that have effects in the same area).
- Public policy evaluation assesses the relevance (adaptation of objectives to needs) and utility (response to needs) of a policy, as well as making recommendations aimed at improving or reconsidering it.
- Evaluation gives great importance to collaboration with stakeholders, who accompany the public policy evaluator during the evaluation process and have to adopt a constructive attitude towards this process.

Thus, the divergences manifest themselves in the broader dimension that evaluation shows regarding the initial and final phases of the process. Indeed, in a more comprehensive perspective, evaluation allows us to examine, in the initial phase, the "needs" from which public intervention originates and its relevance in terms of the objectives established by the programme or policy. It also allows us to evaluate the internal coherence between objectives and actions, and the external coherence of the intervention regarding other public actions. Likewise, evaluation, in its final phase, allows us to complement the impact of the intervention on the target population and sometimes on society as a whole, through an evidence analysis process to qualify the utility of public action linked to its ultimate purpose.

Regarding the basic sequence of processes and references to the effectiveness, efficiency, and internal coherence of public intervention, as well as its orientation to the results obtained, both institutions, performance audit and evaluation, are similar, as in the case of their open use of the broad range of methodologies and techniques present in the social sciences, although auditing is usually more restrictive in practice.

FIGURE 1: CONFLUENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION AND PERFORMANCE AUDIT



In fact, both formulations, performance audit and evaluation, share core aspects in terms of analysis, diagnosis, methodology, configuration of certain processes, management independence, and risk formulation, among other questions. Even in terms of their focus on results, they share a common tradition, although this is more widespread in evaluation. In auditing, it is also possible to incorporate a questionnaire into a plan, whose answers provide evidence that can establish the results of the work. They can also share not only economic but also social and environmental approaches, along with principles such as equity, gender perspective, sustainability and good governance.

In this sense, the European Court of Auditora-ECA (2017:12) states: "Both activities involve the examination of policy design, implementation processes and their consequences to provide an assessment of economy, efficiency and effectiveness of an entity or activity. They require similar knowledge, skills and experience and involve similar methods for collecting and analysing data. The main difference is the context in which they take place and the purpose of each". Adding that, although performance or management audits do not aim to provide comprehensive evaluations of community activities: "Performance audits will usually include evaluative elements of selected subjects and consider evaluation systems and information with a view to assessing their quality and, when they are considered to be satisfactory and relevant, use evaluation information as audit evidence" (European Court of Auditors, 2017: 13).

The most significant differences undoubtedly stem from the different origins and historical and cultural trajectories of the institutions that support them. The weight of the normative, legal, and audit tradition, in a transition towards results orientation, fundamentally impacts performance audit. Whereas governance, stakeholder participation, scientism, and the public policy approach are more present in evaluation.

Moreover, we cannot ignore the fact that both performance audit and evaluation do not conform to a homogeneous architecture within each set. There is a plurality of interpretations and focuses of attention in each of the two models, allowing for discussions of hybrids and gradual processes and mixed performances. Performance audit could potentially incorporate some evaluation criteria such as sustainability, coherence, relevance, orientation to results and impacts, and pay more attention to stakeholders and the influence of recommendations made.

On the other hand, we believe that evaluation could leverage performance audit, strengthening some of its techniques, verifying the origin and scope of information and data on which findings and evidence are built, as well as the use of risk management.

The incorporation of evaluation elements into performance audit may not be limited to setting objectives and assuming questioning formulas such as evaluation questions but also adopting certain methodological techniques used in evaluation, such as elements of pluralistic evaluation and cost-benefit analysis. This could also include the triangulation process and mixed techniques of analysis and indicators, both quantitative and qualitative. Integrating quasi-experimental processes may be more challenging.

In conclusion, from a pragmatic perspective, **a more transversal and complementary view between performance audit and evaluation is possible. Both institutions, tools and work processes are part of an evaluation ecosystem in which auditing also contributes techniques and tools to validate the necessary information and evidence to understand how public intervention has been applied and the effective results achieved.**

1.2. BEYOND EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY, AND ECONOMY: OTHER EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each evaluation has a different scope depending on the questions it seeks to answer, its purpose, nature, method, phase in which it is applied, evaluator characteristics, consideration of recipients, or intended usefulness. It has been said that there are no two identical evaluations, and even what may be valid in a specific context or with a particular population following a methodology may not be valid in different contexts or even at different times.

Traditionally, it has been pointed out that evaluation can focus on solving a problem, the objectives of a programme, outcomes, or effective management. In any case, evaluation is the result of a long evolutionary process, linked to various scientific paradigms: economic, econometric, statistical, sociological, political, administrative, pedagogical, institutional, and any branch of sciences or research. Moreover, its execution impacts the type of evaluation chosen, depending on the stage of the public policy cycle (ex-ante, ex post, intermediate, meta-evaluation) or the problems or programmes to which it refers.

In addition to the use of criteria of a specifically economic nature, there are other criteria of different natures which are also used, for example, in development cooperation, sustainability; in social matters, equity or redistribution; environmental criteria; political and governance aspects; gender and other strategic or performance sectoral criteria, as well as criteria for programmes, which can be explicitly adopted for evaluations.

1.3. BRIEF REFERENCE TO ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

As suggested earlier, moving from performance audit to public policy evaluation may require, among other actions, introducing changes in the methodology used, as well as in the scope, objectives, and approach selected at the beginning of the activities. These methodological changes, which can be of different magnitudes, will inevitably lead, in the short and medium term, to progressive changes in the organization and functioning of the institution, as part of the process of implementing a certain evaluation culture.

To address these changes, in an ideal situation, an institutional roadmap or strategy should be designed to plan the necessary actions and transformations to have the essential human and technical resources to progressively implement an evaluation culture. However, this situation rarely occurs in organizations or institutions with a long tradition in auditing, such as External Control Institutions, where the process is more likely to occur gradually through the introduction of methodological changes in performance or management audits, due to their proximity to evaluation, and modifications in internal processes, promoting an impulse that will largely come from the audit teams themselves.

However, it must start from the need to design and implement a certain strategy to plan and successfully carry out the change process. Therefore, the starting point will necessarily involve conducting a prior analysis and diagnosis of the institution regarding three fundamental aspects:

- Leadership and governance of the process.
- Capacity in terms of human and technical resources.
- Organizational changes to be implemented.

1.3.1. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The role that the institution's governing body plays as a driver of change is a key element in the process of evolving towards conducting evaluations or audits with an evaluative approach. In fact, according to the European Court of Auditors (2013), support for evaluations from "above" is essential to have effective management of the demand for evaluations. Therefore, some immediate questions to consider could be:

- ¿How can the institution contribute to promoting and institutionalizing an evaluation culture throughout the public sector? And in society?
- ¿What is the demand for evaluations from society, parliaments, and/or public managers in the institution's reference area?
- ¿What is the level of commitment of the institution's leading executives regarding the adoption of the evaluative approach?
- ¿How can the institution contribute to driving the effective demand for evaluations from public managers?
- ¿What internal and external limitations could arise when adopting an evaluative approach?
- ¿What changes, besides methodological ones, must the institution face to address this new approach?
- ¿What potential barriers will we encounter with these changes?
- ¿What factors could limit the approach and scope of audits applying an evaluative methodology?
- ¿Is the necessary involvement of stakeholders in the procedure feasible?

Answering these and other additional questions is crucial in a top-down approach as suggested, as the institution's governing bodies will have to make decisions and drive the process after conducting this initial diagnosis.

1.3.2. CAPACITY IN TERMS OF HUMAN AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

Capacity analysis is essential in the strategic planning of change in any institution in order to be realistic when determining both the objectives to be achieved and the time frame for their fulfilment.

In the specific case of conducting performance audits with an evaluative approach, a critical aspect will be knowing which teams could be trained to carry out these types of audits, based on experience and knowledge; what material resources they will need, and what limitations they might encounter. Therefore, the following questions can be raised:

- ¿Does the institution have individuals/teams with extensive experience in conducting performance or management audits?
- ¿How often do audit teams use certain evaluation techniques in performance audits?
- ¿Does the institution have multidisciplinary teams to address different areas of public policies?
- ¿Are there training needs related to different evaluation methods?
- ¿Are there difficulties in applying quantitative methods that require specific knowledge?
- ¿What technical and technological resources are necessary to conduct performance audits with an evaluative approach?
- ¿Does the institution have the means to involve stakeholders in the procedure?
- ¿Do we have our own guides or manuals for conducting these types of audits?
- ¿Do we have sufficient capabilities in areas such as data management and its application in evaluations?

This second diagnosis will allow decisions to be made to strengthen and mobilize the available resources in the organization to direct them towards conducting performance audits with an evaluative approach, although the necessary changes are not limited only to human and technical resources, as will be explained below.

1.3.3. CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE ORGANIZATION

The answers to some questions mentioned above will inevitably lead to addressing changes of varying magnitudes within the institution aimed at eliminating existing or future barriers, having the necessary human and technical resources, and, above all, providing the institution with a certain flexibility and adaptability to change. Some of the relevant issues that may arise include:

- ¿What barriers does the timing of audits impose regarding the application of certain evaluation methods?
- ¿Are there any impediments of any kind (legal, organizational, etc.) to hiring external experts to advise on specific issues in the report that might require a high degree of specialization?
- ¿Is the existing communication policy sufficient and appropriate to achieve the desired level of dissemination of the results?
- ¿Is it possible to reach agreements with other organizations or institutions dedicated to evaluation to collaborate in this area?
- ¿How can a culture of evaluation be developed throughout the institution?
- ¿Is there a quality assurance unit for audits?
- ¿Is it necessary to modify internal rules and/or manuals, if available?
- ¿Which units of the institution participate in the change process?

These are some of the questions that any institution wishing to design a strategy to implement the use of evaluation methodology in performance audits should ask itself so that the process can be approached gradually with the involvement of the participants. However, most likely, and as often happens, the process will be less planned and more progressive. In any case, training and adaptation of teams and the evaluation methodology used should be at the centre of this process.

2. PERFORMANCE AUDIT PLANNING WITH AN EVALUATIVE APPROACH

Any audit must be planned to ensure high-quality work in an economical, efficient, and effective manner. Planning in a performance audit should be a tool that guides the execution process and provides the basic knowledge and information needed to understand the entity, programme, or public intervention.

For performance audits, a rigorous, detailed, and exhaustive planning process is essential, especially for those incorporating an evaluative approach. This is because the complexity, diversity, and interrelation of public interventions are combined with the innovative approach of using evaluation tools and dimensions. Therefore, this phase is crucial for determining the audit's objectives, scope, and required methodology to achieve the proposed objectives.

This preliminary or previous study in the field of evaluation is called a feasibility study. According to *INTOSAI GUID 9020*, it should lead to a planning memorandum for the evaluation, defining the evaluation's framework and validating different elements (policy description, stakeholder identification, evaluation questions, evaluation approach organization, methodology selection, and scientific instruments). The purpose of the preliminary study is to determine if the necessary conditions exist for conducting a major study and, if this is the case, to present an audit proposal along with a work plan, documented in a report, technical guidelines, or planning memorandum.

This document should generally include:

- The nature, timing, and extent of the planned procedures for risk assessment.
- The nature, timing, and extent of the planned subsequent audit procedures to address the proposed objectives necessary for the work to comply with applicable standards. These procedures may include or describe various aspects of the audit, such as:
 - A review of the legal framework.
 - A brief description of the activity, programme or entity to be audited.
 - The reasons for conducting the audit.
 - The factors affecting it, including those determining the materiality of the matters considered.
 - Objectives and scope.
 - The approach.
 - Characteristics of the audit evidence to be gathered, as well as the procedures needed to gather and analyse the evidence.
 - Required resources and a schedule for their completion.
 - The form, content and users of the audit report.

2.1. PRELIMINARY WORK

The purpose of preliminary work is to accumulate sufficient knowledge about the entity, activity, operation, programme, or public policy to determine whether or not the audit is realistic, reasonable, and useful in terms of improving the management of entity being audited. The scope of the necessary preliminary study depends on the audit team's previous knowledge of the analysis area. In any case, this study should allow the preparation of the audit plan.

Prior to detailed planning, the audit team must acquire updated and comprehensive knowledge that enables them to understand the subject matter to be audited. This includes an understanding of:

- The nature of the programme, plan or public intervention role, and function, including activities, processes in general, and development trends, among others).
- Legislation and the purpose of public policy.
- Organizational structure and accountability relationships.
- Internal and external environment of the controlling entity and stakeholders.
- External constraints affecting policy implementation.
- Previous research in the corresponding field.
- The processes and available resources.

Obtaining the necessary knowledge is a continuous and cumulative process of collecting and evaluating information and relating the resulting knowledge to audit tests throughout all phases of the audit. Auditors should weigh up the costs of obtaining information against its added value to the audit. Information sources include:

- Current legislation and parliamentary debates.
- Statements and decisions of the managers.
- Reports of recent audits, reviews, evaluations, and investigations.
- Scientific research and studies (even in other regions and countries).
- Strategic plans and annual reports.
- Organizational charts, internal guidelines, and operating manuals.
- Programme evaluations and internal audit plans and reports.
- Reports and minutes of conferences or committees.
- Expert opinions in the relevant field.
- Discussions with the audited entity's management and key stakeholders.

- Management information systems and official statistics.
- Information held by public coordination bodies or public administration committees.
- Work done by other public administrations.
- Media coverage.

This prior knowledge should at least allow the following objectives, which will be addressed in this section and the following one (audit design):

- Evaluate the internal control system.
- Identify the objectives and logic of public intervention, as well as the resources allocated to it.
- Determine the respective responsibilities of different actors and examine stakeholders.
- Identify and assess audit risks.
- Specify the type of engagement and assurance.
- Determine materiality.
- Define potential audit questions and criteria, scope, methodology, tests, and audit impact.
- Determine the proposed audit's schedule and resources.

2.1.1. EVALUATING THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM

Internal control is defined as the set of rules and procedures established and applied to ensure the organization's smooth functioning. Evaluating the internal control system is a prerequisite and essential in any type of audit. An internal control system is considered adequate when, at reasonable costs lower than the benefits it provides, it offers enough assurance to cover the following objectives: safeguarding the entity's assets or resources, providing reliability to accounting records, and ensuring the organization operates in accordance with applicable regulations and principles of good management.

According to International Audit Technical Standards, the auditor must obtain knowledge of internal control relevant to the audit. Whether a control, individually or in combination with others, is relevant to the audit is a matter of the auditor's professional judgment.

Knowledge of internal control facilitates identifying potential errors and factors affecting the risks of material misstatement, as well as designing the nature, timing, and extent of subsequent audit procedures.

2.1.2. IDENTIFYING THE OBJECTIVES AND LOGIC OF PUBLIC INTERVENTION. ALLOCATED RESOURCES

Public intervention, regardless of its nature (policy, programme, measure, or project), can be analysed as a set of financial, organizational, and human resources mobilized to achieve specific objectives within a defined period, aiming to solve or overcome a problem affecting specific groups. The use of logical models can help the audit team identify and establish the relationship between the socio-economic needs that the intervention addresses, and its objectives, resources, processes, achievements, and effects, including immediate results (immediate changes for direct participants) and long-term impacts (consequences of the intervention).

A good understanding of the objectives and logic of the intervention is fundamental for the planning of the performance audits with an evaluative approach. And as highlighted later, this understanding is a primary factor in formulating audit or evaluation questions.

By reconstructing the logic of the intervention, a comprehensive analysis of the intervention is conducted, allowing a rigorous understanding of its key elements and the context in which it occurs. The intervention is evaluated concerning its design and implementation, identifying factors influencing the outcomes. The internal argument of the evaluated intervention is explored, primarily using public policy analysis techniques and tools.

To confirm the relative importance of the audit area, the human, administrative, and financial resources allocated to the public intervention must be determined. This involves analysing budget appropriations, committed amounts, recognized obligations, and payments made.

2.1.3. DETERMINING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF DIFFERENT ACTORS AND EXAMINING STAKEHOLDERS. DEFINING INFORMATION NEEDS AND AVAILABILITY

A fundamental aspect of performance audits involves considering the public performance entities responsible for various areas of action. This allows determining the subjective scope of the audit.

The examination of stakeholders in public intervention should also occur, identifying their degree of participation, the level of connection between them, and the appropriateness of the interaction. During this examination, performance audit must assess whether communication channels allow adequate feedback and whether these channels are accessible and straightforward for stakeholders.

Additionally, during planning, the types of data and reports used to manage, monitor, and control audited activities or measures must be identified. Special attention should be given to identifying data contained in information systems, anticipated information needs, and their impact on the audit approach.

2.1.4. IDENTIFYING AND EVALUATING AUDIT RISKS

Auditors must actively manage audit risk, i.e., the risk of drawing incorrect or incomplete conclusions, providing imbalanced information, or not adding value. Many performance audit topics are complex and politically sensitive. While avoiding these topics can reduce the risk of inaccuracy and bias, it might also limit the opportunity to add value. The risk of an audit not adding value varies from not being able to provide new information or perspectives to neglecting essential factors, thus failing to offer valuable insights or recommendations to improve management genuinely.

Risk is an integral part of the entire audit process and methodology. Therefore, audit planning documents should indicate possible or known risks in the planned work and demonstrate how these risks should be managed. **Risk assessment, a crucial tool used in all planning stages, allows the identification of those areas requiring audit procedures and so reduce the risk to an appropriate level.**

Audit risk (AR) is defined as the probability that the conclusion would have been different if the operations had been reviewed in their entirety. The AR consists of the following risks:

- **Inherent Risk (IR):** related to the entity's activity and nature.
- **Control Risk (CR):** the risk that accounting and internal control systems do not detect or allow timely correction of a significant error.

- **Detection Risk (DR):** the risk that significant errors are not detected by the substantive testing carried out in the audit.

During planning, the audit team must analyse the relative importance of these risks and study their probability of occurrence and possible qualitative and quantitative impact. Measures taken by the audited entity to mitigate these risks are considered, and planned audit procedures are determined to minimize the effects of these risks during the audit process.

2.1.5. TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT AND ASSURANCE

In performance audits with an evaluative approach, the type of commitment is typically a direct report. In this type of commitment, the auditor measures or evaluates the subject matter according to established criteria. The auditor selects the subject matter and criteria, considering the risk and materiality. The result of measuring the subject matter based on the criteria is presented in the audit report as work results, conclusions, recommendations, or an opinion. It can also provide new information, analysis, or a better understanding of the subject.

While performance audits do not issue opinions but, instead, present results in the form of conclusions, all audit work must have a reasonable assurance about the corresponding results and assessments. This assurance should be reasonable, meaning that recipients of the reports expect to trust their content to make decisions. **Therefore, they expect reports that inspire confidence and whose conclusions are based on sufficient and appropriate evidence, avoiding inappropriate reports.**

2.1.6. DETERMINING MATERIALITY OR RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

Materiality can be understood as the relative importance of a topic in the context in which it is being considered. Consideration should be given to whether deficiencies found in a particular area can influence other activities within the audited entity. **A matter will be considered material when it is of particular importance, and improvement proposals have significant relevance.**

Materiality affects all aspects of performance audit, such as topic selection, criteria definition, evidence evaluation, documentation, and managing the risks of drawing irrelevant conclusions. Materiality should be considered at all stages of the audit process, and it aims to take into account not only financial aspects should be taken into account, but also the social and timing aspects of the subject being audited. matter.

In performance audits, monetary materiality may be, though not necessarily, a primary concern. When defining it, socially significant aspects should also be considered, and we should bear in mind that this perception can change over time.

2.1.7. DETERMINING THE SCHEDULE AND RESOURCES OF THE PROPOSED AUDIT

Experience shows that the time required for each phase of the audit must be planned realistically, based on past results.

To estimate the completion time, we must consider the human resources available for development and the qualifications of the personnel involved, which should be adequate and preferably have sufficient experience for the proposed audit.

Additionally, the technological resources available to the team must be considered, allowing them to achieve specific goals such as conducting various types of tests, reducing fieldwork deadlines, and ultimately adhering to the planned schedule.

2.2. AUDIT DESIGN

2.2.1. APPROACH, OBJECTIVES, AND SCOPE

Comparing performance audit practices in different countries, *INTOSAI* generally recognizes three types of approaches: the results-oriented approach, which assesses whether predefined objectives have been achieved as expected; the problem-oriented approach, which verifies and analyses the causes of particular problem(s); or even a systems-oriented approach, which evaluates the proper functioning of management systems.

Furthermore, performance audits can adopt either a top-down perspective, focusing on the requirements, intentions, objectives, and expectations of the Legislative, Executive, and/or regulatory body, or a bottom-up perspective, focusing on the effects of the activity on the audited entity and the community in general.

In any case, the results-oriented approach, due to its characteristics, provides more possibilities for conducting a performance audit that incorporates evaluation elements. This approach involves studying performance in the context of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness but could also extend to other criteria such as equity, sustainability, coherence, relevance, or impacts.

Once the approach is defined, the interrelation between the objectives and the scope of the audit becomes evident. Objectives determine the reasons for their selection and serve as the starting point for formulating the questions that will guide the audit work. They can be considered as a statement of goals and logically influence the formulation of audit or evaluation questions.

According to the International Development Initiative of *INTOSAI* (IDI)¹ (2021), when developing the objectives of a performance audit, the following factors need to be considered:

- ¿Are the objectives formulated in a way that allows for a clear and unequivocal conclusion?
- ¿Do the objectives provide audited entities and stakeholders with sufficient information to easily understand the reason for conducting the audit, as well as the focus and goal of that audit?
- ¿Are the objectives expressed in clear and simple terms?
- ¿Are the objectives clear and specific, achievable, fair and unbiased, politically neutral, and measurable?
- ¿Do the objectives consider possible performance deficiencies? If so, is this circumstance documented?
- ¿Do the objectives allow for the inclusion as part of the audit topic?

¹ The *INTOSAI* Development Initiative (IDI) is an *INTOSAI* body whose objective is to support the capacity building of Supreme Audit Institutions.

Regarding scope, it defines the limits of the audit and is directly related to the audit or evaluation questions. In a performance audit with an evaluative approach, defining the scope appropriately, without attempting to cover all possible aspects, is essential to ensure the completion of the work. To achieve this, auditors need to define²:

WHAT	Public programme, plan, policy, or activity under examination
WHO	Public and private entities involved and the beneficiary population
WHERE	Geographical area of the audit
WHEN	Time period covered by the audit

It is worth noting that evaluation involves examining the subject matter with broader temporal and contextual scope than traditional audits, considering its overall and socioeconomic impact. Therefore, in performance audits with an evaluative approach, the temporal scope could be broader.

2.2.2. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

In the logical sequence of designing a performance audit with an evaluative approach, after determining the approach, objectives, and scope, the next step is to formulate audit questions. These questions are part of a detailed reflection process, in which an initial discussion of possible alternatives begins the process that eventually leads to findings and evidence through the questions asked.

The set of possible questions should be established according to the determinants of the public programme or policy under consideration, institutional context, programme type, specific mandate received, type of audit or evaluation, among other factors.

Following a traditional criterion, evaluations can answer three types of questions, depending on whether they relate to understanding the logic of the programme or policy, the coherence and consistency of the programme or policy, or the analysis of the results and impacts achieved by the public activity.

The so-called **descriptive questions**: These questions aim to understand or describe the logic of the programme or process under analysis. They are also used to describe inputs, activities, and products and to collect the opinions of the main stakeholders involved.

²Adapted from ECA (2017).

- What are the objectives of the programme or policy?
- Who are the main actors involved in politics?
- What is the beneficiary population of the programme?
- What are the instruments through which the objectives of the policy are to be achieved?
- What services does the programme provide to the beneficiary population?
- How is the beneficiary population registered in the programme?
- Are there any differences regarding how the programme is implemented in different geographical areas?
- Is the beneficiary population satisfied with the services received? What is the cost of the programme?

The **normative questions** compare the current situation against a goal, target, or a comparison standard. Normative questions are commonly used in compliance audits.

If the programme has a results-based monitoring system with indicators and objectives, as well as a fixed time frame to achieve them, normative questions can also be used to answer questions about inputs, activities, and products.

- Is it doing what is proposed to be done?
- Is the intended goal being achieved?
- Are the objectives of the policy analysed consistent with the objectives of other government policies?
- Does the design of the programme respond to the needs of the beneficiary population?
- Is the allocation of the programme's resources sufficient compared to its objectives?
- Is the programme or policy being properly implemented?
- Have more resources been spent than planned to carry out the activities of the programme?
- Do the benefits earned by the resources invested in the programme or policy justify?

The **cause-and-effect questions** aim to establish the additional outcome brought about by an intervention. They are known as result, impact, or attributive questions, and they attempt to measure changes caused by the intervention. Cause and effect questions seek to establish the effective results of a project, programme, or public policy.

- How much did the policy contribute to improving the well-being of citizens?
- To what extent did the programme have the desired effects on the target population?
- Does the programme have any indirect effects (positive or negative) on people other than the beneficiary population?
- How can its impacts on society be measured in the medium term?

Performance audits with an evaluative approach may include these questions and some others in the deployment of work throughout their various stages. For example, when describing the work to be started, indicating the dimensions and main analysis criteria, the methods and techniques to be used, as well as causality, and finally, asking questions related to the effects and results obtained.

The questions outlined below often reflect the general process that an evaluative performance audit can deploy and can serve as a reference. However, it is essential to determine, in the specific context of the mandate, which questions may be relevant for evaluation and, in particular, which objectives need to be achieved.

1. INITIAL DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS REGARDING COMMISSION, PROGRAMME OR POLICY

- Is the mandate or assignment for the performance audit clear and precise? Are there any ambiguities that need clarification? Is it advisable to expand or narrow its scope?
- Does the selected team have a diverse technical profile? Would it be advisable to complement it with an external expert or validator?
- What is the origin and scope of the problem(s) to be addressed?
- What are the main objectives of the programme or policy, and how are they expected to be achieved?
- Are the activities in line with the established objectives?
- Will administrative functions, processes, and project management be analyzed?
- Who are the main stakeholders involved?
- Who is the beneficiary population of the programme?
- What services or actions does the programme provide to the beneficiary population?
- What is the procedure through which the beneficiary population registers or applies for inclusion in the programme? What biases could it introduce?
- What instruments are used to achieve the objectives?
- Are there differences in how the programme is implemented in different geographical areas or centers based on available resources in each case?
- What are the main risks of public action and the audit itself in this context?
- Who are the most qualified experts and opinion leaders in this field?
- What analyses and evaluations have been conducted previously? What does the evidence-based literature say on this matter?
- Is the beneficiary population satisfied with the approved measures?
- What is the initial cost of the programme? What resources does it use? What would be the best indicators to assess effectiveness and efficiency?

2. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DIMENSION AND THE MAIN CRITERIA TO USE

- Regarding the achievement of the objectives of public action: Are the objectives sufficiently coherent with other government policies? Are there other actions blocking their development and hindering their results? Are these objectives pertinent to the intended purpose?
- Regarding the development of management processes: Is the analysis of effectiveness and efficiency sufficiently grounded in robust information and data capable of providing evidence? Is the programme or policy being implemented properly? Have there been delays, plan changes, or obstacles in coordination between actors that significantly affected it?
- Are the results the fundamental approach that is intended to be applied to the audit? What benchmarks of the results are to be highlighted? Do we only consider the expected effects, or will the unforeseen effects also be noted?
- Beyond the changes in the target population, is it intended to analyze the impacts in the medium term or on society as a whole?
- What weight do we expect accountability and good public governance to have the analysis? Do we consider accountability in a rather broad sense or restricted to the economic factor? Do we consider other explicit factors? What aspects do we intend to prioritize, as a result of the mandate of the audit, or because they significantly affect the programme being audited?
- Does the design of the programme respond to the needs of the beneficiary population?
- Is the allocation of programme resources sufficient compared to its main objectives?
- Did the programme or policy achieve the main objectives it had planned?
- Have more resources been spent than was planned to carry out the activities of the programme?
- With regard to utility, do they justify the benefits obtained from the resources invested in the programme or policy, in relation to other alternatives?

3. QUESTIONS REGARDING THE METHOD AND TECHNIQUES TO BE USED AND THE CAUSE-EFFECT RELATIONSHIP

- How much has the policy contributed to improving the well-being of citizens?
- Has the programme achieved its objectives?
- To what extent did the programme have the desired effects on the beneficiary population?
- Does the programme have any indirect effects (positive or negative) on people other than the beneficiary population?
- Is there an explicit logic, regarding the intended public intervention, in the decrees, laws, documents or programmes that have established it?

- Is the reconstruction of the “logic of the intervention” considered sufficiently robust? Have they been reached with firm evidence?
- What main audit method and what type of evaluative analysis will be applied to achieve evidence?
- Is the use of triangulation techniques intended? Is the use of a pluralistic approach to evaluation considered? Cost-benefit? Impact assessment?
- What other techniques and tools common in the social sciences will be used?
- Are the indicators selected on the basis of sufficiently robust criteria and, where appropriate, validated?
- Does the analysis of compliance with the intended effects of the programme, as well as the causality/correlation assumptions established to achieve findings and evidence, have the necessary technical rigour?
- Are the possible biases of the results obtained in the case of the use of control groups analyzed rigorously, integrating both the observable and the various non-observable ones, based on rigorous techniques?

4. QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE EFFECTS AND RESULTS CONSIDERED

- Can the source of each of the information or data be identified?
- Do the conclusions overcome the apparent contradictions or inconsistencies between the data if they exist?
- Are all the answers to audit questions supported by solid data?
- Is it known if the programme works and why? In the event that it doesn't work, how could it work?
- Does the report show the strengths and risks of the programme being evaluated, as well as the opportunities and threats that may arise?
- Depending on the scope of the audit, does it include the limitations of the work itself and its causes (resources, time, lack of validated information, etc.)?
- Are all conclusions based on the report's findings, are recommendations for improvement, are realistic and derived from the conclusions reached?
- Is there specific planning for communicating the findings of the report and a consideration of its influence as a reference element?

In any case, it would be advisable to undertake a process of reflection and choice of evaluation questions, which could have the following sequence:

- I. In the first phase, which some authors consider to be “divergent”, and which could be considered as a form of “brainstorming”, **the evaluation team develops a broad list of potentially important possible questions and concerns**. Numerous sources are consulted in order to discuss and open minds to the questions that are finally to be included. A great deal of this information can be of a qualitative nature. The evaluation team should try to see the programme through the eyes of the different sectors of the decision-making community, including the professionals who manage it and the citizens it will serve. At some point, after the “brainstorming”, the evaluation team must stop and examine the list of questions and start organizing them.
- II. In the second phase, which could be called “convergent”, the evaluation team significantly reduces the list of questions generated, to identify the most critical questions. The team should also decide which are the key questions taking into consideration questions such as: What do the main actors involved want to know?; Would you offer relevant and timely information to decision makers?; Would the scope or comprehensiveness of the assessment be seriously limited if these questions were not included?; Would it influence the programme or policy being analyzed?; Would you promote improvements in knowledge and public management?; Are the information and data used robust, accessible and can be validated? The assessment team should pay particular attention to the questions posed by key stakeholders. If there are disagreements about the questions, it is important to resolve them at this early stage. The process helps the evaluation team, as well as other stakeholders, to establish a sense of shared ownership or partnership that can be valuable during the later stages of the evaluation.
- III. In the third phase, the most suitable questions are deployed. To develop optimal evaluation questions, the evaluation team can also start from the important problems addressed by the project, programme or policy and further reduce less significant questions.

The main problems can also be identified following a comparative review of the literature, including evaluations of similar programmes, the theory of change and the documents of the specific programme, adding them to discussions with stakeholders.

Only key questions should be selected which, in order to provide good quality answers, should not be numerous. It is usually recommended that a selection never exceeds eight or ten key questions. As a technical limit, it is advisable not to deal with multiple questions and also to limit the different sub-questions, considering the usefulness that the answers may mean for the work.

2.2.3. CRITERIA

In performance audit, criteria identify situations upon which the comparison or evaluation of actual performance is based to determine if a plan, programme, or public policy fulfils its stated objectives (i.e., comparing the real situation with the theoretical one). Obviously, these criteria, considering the subject examined, will vary from one audit to another, and may be qualitative or quantitative, general or specific. However, when incorporating the evaluative approach into performance audit, it must be considered that evaluation systematically involves considering those factors determining a public programme or policy. These factors are presented as criteria or evaluation principles.

In evaluation, just like in auditing, criteria are used to make value judgments that must address the questions intended to be answered regarding the objectives. Thus, criteria serve as a reference to create the structure of the questions the evaluation aims to answer.

The most common criteria in the evaluation of public programmes and policies are the following:

Relevance: The appropriateness and adequacy of an activity to obtain an intended result or to solve a problem.

Relevance aims to analyse if the objectives set for the programme or policy adequately respond to real needs and existing problems. This criterion is linked to the consistency of the objective concerning the problem it aims to solve. It measures the public intervention's contribution concerning the problem, considering the intervention's context and the detected needs.

Objectives can be defined at different levels, as can the actions, and they have to be articulated with the rest of the programme of intervention. Aspects such as the relevance of the strategy, the robustness of the indicator system, or the governance framework itself can be considered. In this way:

- The analysis is based on the quality of how public programme objectives are formulated.
- It holds special importance in the design phase of a public policy.
- The relevance analysis can provide answers to questions such as:
 - ¿What do the programme or policy objectives aim to achieve?
 - ¿Is the outcome of each policy objective clearly identified?
 - ¿Has it been taken into account when the objectives will be met?

Relevance analysis can be hindered by the lack of consensus on existing needs and priorities, different assessments and interests, and the lack of specificity of public policy. Sometimes, conducting a SWOT³ analysis for diagnostic quality can be particularly advisable as a methodology.

For performance audits with an evaluative focus conducted by an External Control Institution, depending on the mandate, this criterion might be limited to analysing whether the resources applied are appropriately aligned with the intended objectives. This would determine impediments to achieving these objectives and whether, given the results, it is advisable to reflect on their validity or modification.

Significance: Importance or significance that stands out as a priority or exceptional, or that catches attention.

The significance analysis is linked to the evaluation of the quality and truthfulness of the diagnosis made. It allows identifying the scope of the problem and the methodology used in the formulation of public policy or programme.

In ex-ante evaluation, significance questions are the most important because the focus is on choosing the best possible intervention strategy. In a midterm evaluation, the objective may be to verify if the socio-economic context has evolved as expected, what the real outcome has been, and how other factors have contributed. It is also essential to assess whether the observed evolution necessitates the modification of some of the established objectives.

³ Analysis based on the study of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of an intervention.

The significance analysis provides answers to questions such as: To what extent are the interventions aligned with the detected needs and priorities, or was the objective of improving public policy relevant in the context where it was applied?

Among the main problems of these analyses are the lack of information and the limited availability of suitable official statistical data.

Methodologies such as trees or flowcharts are often employed for these evaluations.

Coherence: Logical relationship between two things or between the parts or elements of something, so that no contradictions arise. It can be internal or external.

Internal coherence measures the correspondence and interaction between different objectives and between objectives and actions. It usually provides answers to questions such as:

- Can it be said that activities and results allow objectives to be achieved logically?
- Are there contradictions between objectives at different levels?
- Are there duplications between scheduled activities concerning the achievement of public policy objectives?
- Are legal, human, technical, and financial resources and other established measures appropriate for fulfilling the objectives?

This type of analysis is frequently used in the evaluation policies of the European Union and holds special importance in the design phase or ex-ante evaluation of public policy.

Methodologies such as goal trees or needs assessment and objective evaluation matrices can be used for this analysis. It can also be done through a synergy matrix between thematic objectives, analysing each objective's ability to influence the achievement of others, either by influence (achieving one objective allows achieving other objectives) or by sensitivity (achieving other objectives allows achieving the specific objective).

Internal coherence analysis allows classifying objectives into hierarchical groups:

- Strategic objectives: These are those with an above-average rating in both influence and sensitivity. Therefore, they are key objectives of the strategy due to their high multiplier potential.
- Influential objectives: These are objectives that have a high influencing capacity, superior to the average, but a lower degree of sensitivity.
- Sensitive objectives: These are objectives with sensitivity higher than average but influence lower than average. Their development or success depends to a large extent on the fulfilment or achievement of other objectives. They are highly dependent on the rest.
- Independent objectives: These are objectives that, due to their characteristics, have low influence and sensitivity concerning the average.

Various objectives can be represented through a graphical image of the synergies between them and can be programmed into a coherent integrated action.

External coherence measures the confluence or contradiction with other programmes and policies. The evaluator analyses the level of compatibility between the objectives of public intervention and other policies and programmes with which synergies may exist, as well as their relationship with the environment and its context. The analysis of external coherence should provide answers to questions such as:

- Can it be said that there is no overlap between the policy and other interventions applied in the same territory?
- Do the objectives set in the policy coincide with those expressed in other interventions in the territory?

To carry out this type of analysis, it might be useful to compare problem and objective trees from different plans that present complementarity or use a matrix to assess the complementarity of the intervention with other strategies and programmes.

Impact: The incidence or effect of public intervention on the target population or on society as a whole. The impact analysis is limited to determining the consequences solely derived from the analysed intervention, isolating the effects from other actions or programmes.

Impact can be linked to the medium and long-term effects of the action, whether these are negative, positive, direct, indirect, expected, or unexpected, while determining the results of public intervention concerns immediate or direct effects in the short term on its recipients.

Utility: The degree to which the needs intended to be solved with public intervention have been met.

Utility analysis aims to answer the question of whether the public programme or policy was worthwhile, considering all its direct and indirect effects on the target population and society, including those which are unforeseen or involuntary, as well as the needs intended to be satisfied, in general, after a certain period.

In addition to the above criteria, specific to evaluation, criteria shared with performance **audit, economy, efficiency**, and effectiveness should be added, which are well-known. Likewise, there are other criteria of different nature also used, such as, for example, in development cooperation, **sustainability**; in social matters, **equity, redistribution**; **environmental** criteria; **political and governance** criteria; **gender perspective**; and others that can be explicitly adopted for evaluations.

2.2.4 INDICATORS

Information which is both relevant and aligned with evaluation questions can be obtained through indicators and ratios as well as other sources of information verification with unstructured characteristics, or based on inductive tools, and not always as synthetic as indicators. Let us think, for example, of some tools that can provide relevant information, such as SWOT schemes, Delphi, TGN⁴, Lorenz curves and others.

Strictly speaking, an **indicator is a generally quantitative representation established between two or more variables, which presents relevant information in order to analyze an aspect or focus of reality**. It is a list of data or information that helps us measure the evolution of the programme or policy that is intended to be evaluated and to what extent the strategic or operational objectives that the public intervention aims to achieved are being achieved.

As the main characteristics of the indicators, we could highlight:

- They should be an objective measure of performance in relation to the goals, objectives and responsibilities acquired with the reference groups.
- They should prevent the existence of risks and possible deviations.

⁴TGN or Group Nominal Technique is a group process that involves the identification of a problem, generation of solutions, and decision-making.

- They should allow the analysis of effective results and impacts.

Some criteria for your selection could be:

SELECTION CRITERIA	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	OBJECTIVE
RELEVANCE	Does the indicator clearly and accurately express what you want to measure? Does it answer the evaluation questions asked?	Description of the situation or phenomenon subject to the intended analysis.
SIMPLICITY	Is it easy to understand?	Is it representative of the intended causality or correlation?
OPPORTUNITY	Does it correspond to the basic objectives of the intervention?	Does it relate precisely to some of the basic objectives of the evaluation?
FUNCTIONALITY	Is it easy to keep track and continuous monitoring?	Is the indicator sensitive to changes from the initial situation?
AVAILABILITY	Is the indicator information easily available? Is it built as permanent statistical information?	Can it be consulted on an ongoing and regular basis?
RELIABILITY	Where does the data come from? Do they offer statistical quality?	Is it a position to validate the basic information received?

Undoubtedly, the most relevant indicators to be used in an audit with an evaluative approach should always correspond to the criteria and approach of the evaluation itself. Therefore, those linked to the relevance, usefulness, internal coherence, external coherence and related to the quality and design of the intervention itself acquire importance. Along with those developed from the point of view of performance, such as indicators of efficiency, effectiveness and economy. Last but not least, those indicators and other techniques linked to processes, inputs, activities, products, final results and impacts. Consequently, possible indicators of both quantitative and qualitative nature come into play, consistent with the very nature of the assessment.

It should be borne in mind that structured policies or programmes with explicit strategic or operational objectives often have monitoring systems designed to obtain performance and result indicators and, in principle, pose fewer problems in obtaining and evaluating indicators. Thus, these systems can offer or usually offer three groups or blocks of indicators (CIDEC⁵, 1999):

⁵ Center for Research and Documentation on Problems of the Economy, Employment and Vocational Qualifications.

- **Output indicators**, measuring the degree of financial implementation, the degree of implementation or the level of use of the established means.
- **Result indicators**, which tend to measure direct or immediate impact.
- **Impact indicators**, which are used for longer-term analysis and are structurally more robust.

In any case, the reality is sometimes complex, as indicated in the Practical Guide for the design and conduct of public policy evaluations of the State Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and Quality of Services (AEVAL, 2015), for several reasons:

- Because the evidence shows that in many interventions there are no structured information systems that establish clearly and accurately indicators of implementation or results.
- Because indicators are usually linked to day-to-day management, while evaluation requires indicators that capture a whole wider range of programme criteria or realities. Indicator systems often focus on providing information on direct and expected outcomes, while evaluation could sometimes focus on some additional outcomes, even indirect and unwanted.
- Because information systems focus on aspects related to effectiveness, efficiency or economic-financial management. However, the evaluation operates in a broader area, including criteria of relevance, coherence or complementarity among others.
- Because sometimes the interest of managers lies more in achieving results in terms of previously established indicators than in solving issues related to programmes or public problems.

Given this growing volume of indicators and indices, it is necessary to work in a structured way, collecting or constructing relevant indicators and directly related to the questions and evaluation criteria. In other words, more important than the existence of the indicators themselves is the consideration of the quality and accuracy of the indicators when measuring what is actually intended to be measured, an aspect that can be defined as the validation of the construction of indicators. The latter aspect is directly linked to the difficulty inherent in the analysis of social phenomena or public policies and the existence of limits in measurement.

In this way, it will sometimes be necessary to develop ad hoc indicators, in the absence of already experienced references, designed specifically to capture certain critical elements of the evaluation questions. And if it is not possible to obtain indicators that accurately measure what is interesting, it will be necessary to use approximations, similar indicators or indicators that indirectly capture the phenomenon to be studied.

It is also worth recalling the importance of verification sources in the construction of indicators. While these constitute, in colloquial terms, the purpose they measure, the sources of verification are the place or means we use to extract this information. In a nutshell, they are the sources of data and information.

By their very nature, the sources of analysis are diverse: statistics, observations, reports, management documents, academic studies, minutes, information collection or analysis techniques (surveys, focus groups, interviews, regressions, etc.). In addition, there are multiple classifications of sources of information, for example, according to their nature, they can be internal or external to the intervention, or to the evaluation itself.

In relation to the data, without a doubt, one of the most widely used classifications is the one that differentiates between primary and secondary data. As for the **primary data**, they are data

collected or constructed by the researcher without further processing and are documents of an immediate and non-mediated nature. On the other hand, **secondary data** are those that have been analyzed or further processed. For example, in surveys, primary data would be databases or records that reflect respondents' responses without being processed or analyzed. Records of a programme or lists are also primary data. Another example would be data provided by institutions engaged in the production of statistics: the primary data would be microdata files containing individual records, while secondary data would be those obtained after the exploitation of the primary ones.

2.2.5 METHODOLOGY, TECHNIQUES, AND TOOLS IN EVALUATION

The methodology of an evaluation is the theoretical and scientific framework that provides the basis for estimating the outcomes of a public intervention.

This methodology involves an analytical process, a method used to derive findings based on evidence. The methodology answers the question "how are we going to do it?" **and integrates verifiable, demonstrative, and interpretative records into the evaluation process.** Verifiable record involves direct observations of reality through inductions and/or deductions, which can have a quantitative or qualitative nature. Demonstrative record incorporates inquiry, discussion of evidence based on more articulated proof elements, establishing correlations, and aiming to establish causality relationships. Interpretative record seeks to interpret the obtained data, combining economic, sociological, and other scientific reasoning in an eclectic manner. The combination of approaches is often necessary to give the evaluation greater methodological solidity.

It is important not to confuse methodology - "how are we going to do it?" - with the techniques to be employed - "what are we going to do it with?" Clearly, the method must be the theoretical foundation of the techniques and will depend on the chosen approach(es).

Techniques can be considered as specific procedures through which the evaluator gathers and organizes data (information) using logical and statistical operations, indicators, and ratios based on relevant questioning of the object/focus intended by the evaluation.

The methodology includes the use of a variety of tools from the social sciences that evaluators find useful for selecting the most relevant and appropriate aspects based on existing availabilities, obtainable information, and available resources.

Quantitative and qualitative techniques of all kinds, especially the use of triangulation, combining both types of techniques, are a good example in evaluation, but this does not exhaust the available tools. This can include a SWOT analysis, the Delphi method, TGN analysis, ARIMA, the use of regression techniques, multicriteria analysis, impact evaluation techniques, or risk management techniques.

Equally valid are organizational analyses, theoretical analysis linked with an evaluation object such as using bibliography, repositories, and evidence literature, or the analysis of documentation generated in the implementation of a policy, such as management documents, regulations and rules, projects, and white papers. It may also include meta-evaluation or meta-analysis, analysing

results over time, specific investigations, and simulation models. In short, anything capable of constructing solid evidence can be used if deemed appropriate.

While in recent years the evaluation of public policies has made use of numerous sociological techniques and instruments, particularly through the development of new theoretical approaches, it is true that analytical instruments in the field of economics, such as cost-benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis, and also statistics, have gained great importance. However, this should not translate into a reduction in the space for the use of qualitative analysis techniques.

In any case, the digital revolution, the advent of Big Data and Artificial Intelligence, are rapidly transforming the technological framework and the widespread use of new references and instruments, altering costs, storage and processing possibilities, and even the global cultural and social framework for information extraction and use.

2.2.6 ADAPTED EVALUATION MATRIX

In performance audit, the **design matrix** constitutes an essential tool to present an overview of the work and document it. It provides a structure to synthesize and link the scope, objectives, questions, criteria, and methodology, elements that compose the audit design, facilitating a more systematic and directed process, as well as facilitating communication about its approach with internal stakeholders of the auditing entity, aiding supervision and review.

The adapted evaluation matrix also offers notable possibilities in performance audits with an evaluative approach. This tool logically integrates aspects such as (**Figure 2**):

- The specific relevant questions of the evaluation, as well as sub-questions;
- The chosen evaluation criteria corresponding to each question;
- The selected indicators and tools to answer each question, integrating measurable responses and their sources;
- The necessary data to fill in the indicators and provide information for the success criteria, considering the involved stakeholders and the time required to obtain the data and its feasibility;
- Analytical methods to transform data into indicators or to obtain necessary information, considering how it can be done, who will do it, time required/feasibility to do it;
- Verification and validation of the obtained information;
- Essential results of the conducted analysis, conclusions, and recommendations;
- If applicable, criteria for communication, use, and influence of the obtained evidence.

QUESTIONS	CRITERION	METHODOLOGY	INFORMATION/DATA	INDICATORS	CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Normally, the production of the matrix consists of the following phases:

- I. Writing the questions based on the objectives, scope and intended use of the evaluation, as well as the methodology chosen. The latter may be an initial specific object for the evaluation matrix.
- II. Explaining the main evaluation criteria to be used.
- III. Determining the origin of the information and data obtained and establish the indicators chosen for the analysis.
- IV. Analyzing the sources of verification and validation of the information obtained.
- V. Reviewing the coherence and absence of contradictions in the results and conclusions.

It should be remembered that the matrix is a dynamic tool. It is not a fixed and unalterable instrument. It can be built through partial matrices by collecting phases of the evaluation process, within a systemic plan and, also, updated and transformed as more information becomes available or new data is evaluated. Questions can be accompanied by a clarification of why the question is asked or the terms used.

The greater the understanding of the logic of the intervention, or its implementation, the easier it will be to identify the key elements of the intervention itself or the context in which it is involved. As we enter more deeply into this process, it may be necessary to incorporate new questions or hypotheses into the matrix. It may also occur that in the identification of the sources or in the analysis of the data there are limitations that make it advisable to remove or restrict the scope or scope of some questions or sub-questions, since they cannot be answered with the necessary rigour.

Likewise, throughout the evaluation, the existence of sources of information or data not initially considered can be identified, through interviews with key actors, that motivate both a change in indicators and sources of information, and in the analysis that makes it possible to answer some of the questions.

Finally, the adapted evaluation matrix allows us not only to implement the intended design and configure its usefulness, but also to analyze the quality of the audit with an evaluative approach. The greater the degree of alignment between the final evaluation report and the evaluation matrix, the greater the rigour that can be attributed to it. It also favors the organization of the work of auditors/evaluators, since by clearly establishing the questions and sub-questions, they avoid wasting time and allocating resources to studies that do not provide enough added value, allowing not to deviate in the intended use of the audit with an evaluation approach carried out.

2.2.7 STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE AUDIT

2.2.7.1 CONCEPT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK OF STAKEHOLDERS

In Principle 12 of *INTOSAI*⁶ (The International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions) – "Value and Benefits of Supreme Audit Institutions – Making a Difference to Citizens' Lives," stakeholders are defined as individuals, groups, organizations, members, or systems that can affect or be affected by the actions, objectives, and policies of the government and public entities. **Stakeholders** are also considered to be individuals or groups who may have an interest in the audit project ("other stakeholders").

Regarding the regulatory framework of stakeholders, it is primarily contained in point 6, "Effective Communication with Stakeholders" of the aforementioned Principle 12 of INTOSAI and point 29, "Communication," of ISSAI 300 Principles of Performance Audit (*INTOSAI 2019b*). These points state that auditors must maintain effective communication with relevant stakeholders throughout the audit process and develop effective communication mechanisms that allow both Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) to provide information to stakeholders regarding a performance audit and stakeholders to contribute their knowledge to SAIs.

However, at all times, the independence and impartiality of the SAI must be safeguarded.

In any case, the form and timing of participation must be decided by the audit team based on the various criteria explained throughout this guide.

2.2.7.2 WHY IS STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?

In 2015, *INTOSAI IDI* introduced a programme on SAI collaboration with stakeholders, with the aim of achieving a greater impact of audits through effective stakeholder participation. As a result of the programme, a Guide on SAI Engagement with Stakeholders⁷ was developed.

Benefits for SAIs include increased effectiveness of audit processes and better results, greater legitimacy of the report, and improved implementation of recommendations.

Benefits for stakeholders include promoting strategies aligned with their own agendas and interests, improving the provision of public services, and enhancing the efficiency of public management.

2.2.7.3 WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?

In the audit, attention must be paid to all individuals or groups involved and/or affected by the public intervention (programme or public policy) that shapes its objective scope. In general terms, five main types of stakeholders can be distinguished:

⁶ The INTOSAI Principles are categorized into founding principles and basic principles. The former have historical significance and specify the role and functions to which SAIs should aspire. The latter support the founding principles of a SAI, clarifying the role of SAI in society, as well as the high-level prerequisites for its proper functioning and professional conduct. Principle 12 is a basic principle.

⁷ IDI (2017): [Guidance on Supreme Audit Institution's engagement with stakeholders](#).

- Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Powers.
- Public administrations implementing the public intervention.
- Other entities applying the policy (territorial, local administrations, public or private organizations).
- Interest groups (professionals, businesses, environmental organizations, unions, non-governmental organizations, universities and academic community, media, among others).
- Citizens and companies.

However, not all stakeholders mentioned in the previous paragraphs play the same role in an audit, which must be considered to determine how and when the auditor will address them. The Legislative Power is the ultimate recipient of the reports, along with the Executive Power that undergoes scrutiny by the supervisory body. Likewise, when evidence of any irregularities of any kind is detected, these can be referred to the judicial sphere.

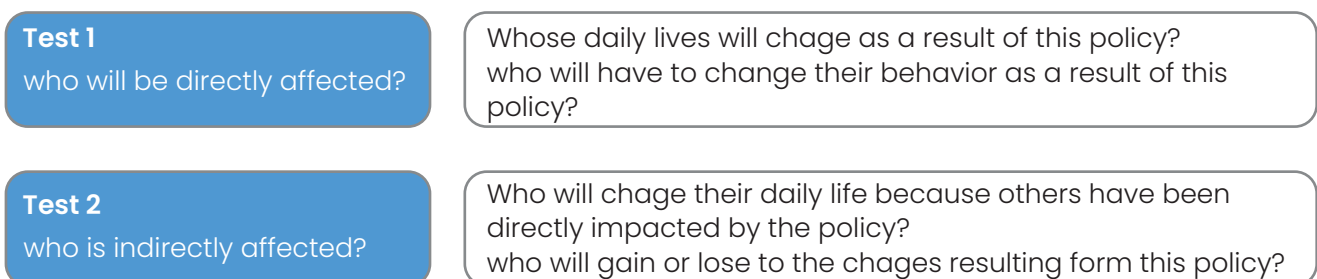
Nevertheless, these recipients will not have a voice and will not participate in the audit. Similarly, in the case of audited public administrations, they will form the subjective scope of the audit and will establish a fluid communication from the beginning of the procedure until the obtained results are communicated to them, constituting an essential source of information throughout the audit.

On the other hand, both interest groups and citizens or private companies can be recipients or affected by a specific policy and, therefore, can play an important role at some point in the audit process, from preliminary work to drafting the conclusions of the report.

Therefore, the process of identifying stakeholders becomes essential to enable their participation in the audit at the most appropriate time. Each institution can design its own procedure for identifying, selecting, and involving stakeholders based on the criteria they consider most appropriate.

In this regard, the European Commission has created a set of tools⁸ that are considered very useful for designing this procedure by determining six tests or questions to try to identify stakeholders and define their level of influence and interest:

FIGURE 3: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS



⁸ European Commission – “Guidelines for stakeholder consultation”, complementing the main guidelines on better regulation, chapter VII of which defines how to consult stakeholders.

Test 3

who is potentially impacted?

In specific circumstances, who will have a different experience as a result of decision?

Test 4

whose help is needed for it to work?

Are there individuals or groups vital in the delivery chain? Who has the capacity to thwart the implementation of the policy unless they cooperate?

Test 5

who do you believe knows about the topic?

Who has studied the topic or published views on it? who possesses detailed technical knowledge that those implementing the policy should also understand?

Test 6

who will show interest in the topic?

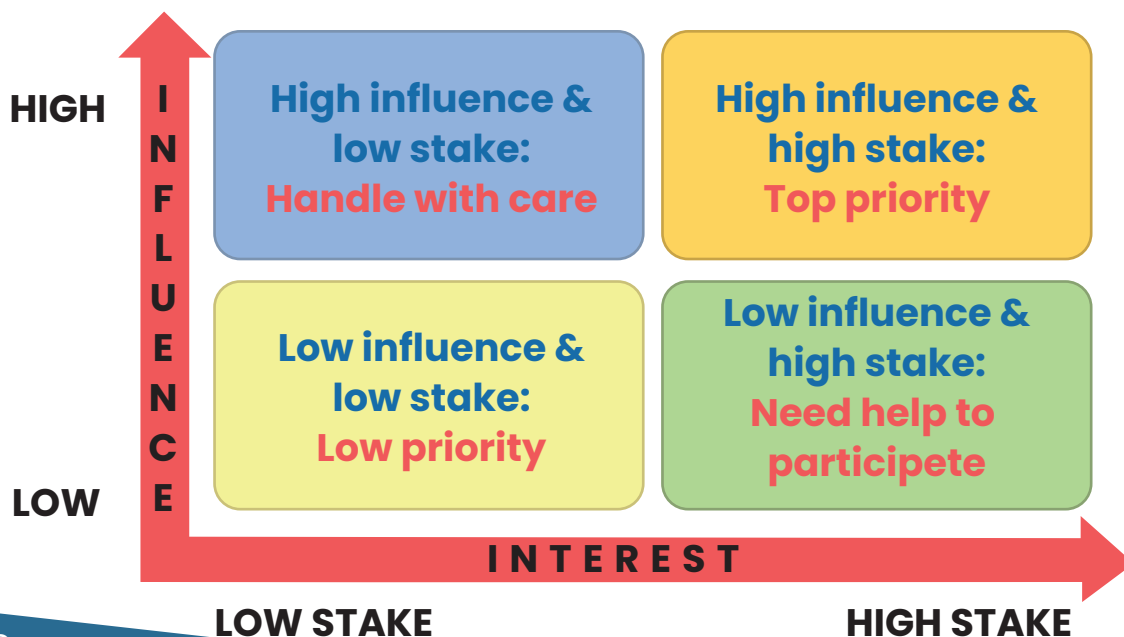
Are there organizations or individuals who believe they have an interest? Has anyone been campaigning on the issue? Is there anyone publishing or broadcasting opinions on the topic?

As a result of these questions, we will obtain a series of stakeholders whom it may not be feasible to involve or consult in their entirety. Therefore, at some point in the planning process, we should identify which stakeholders are a priority for the development of one or several phases of the audit and in what manner they could participate.

2.2.7.4 KEY STEPS FOR DETERMINING STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Naturally, both the relevance or influence and the interest in the policy or programme being evaluated will vary for each identified stakeholder. Thus, creating a stakeholder matrix, allowing for a certain classification, is an invaluable tool. It enables us to categorize stakeholders into four groups based on their level of influence and interest:

FIGURE 4: STAKEHOLDER MATRIX



Constructing this stakeholder matrix is crucial for deciding the methods and instruments for involving selected stakeholders in the ongoing audit process. It helps determine which stakeholders can be omitted from the initially identified list if it is recommended for reasons of effectiveness and efficiency in audit execution.

We will give top priority to engaging those stakeholders who not only have higher influence but also more significant interest in the analysed policy or programme, as their contributions will be significant. Therefore, we will seek to encourage the participation of stakeholders who are considered to be highly influential but who show little interest, by promoting meetings and other informative actions about the purpose and utility of the audit. Stakeholders showing high interest in participation, even if their influence is considered to be limited, will also be considered, aiming to achieve the highest possible legitimacy of the report.

From the matrix and based on the available time and resources, several steps must be followed to determine how stakeholders can be heard and involved in the audit. In this regard, the INTOSAI IDI (2017) Guidance on Supreme Audit Institution's engagement with stakeholders INTOSAI IDI (2017), advocating for effective stakeholder participation in the audit process, provides a model to follow. According to this guide, SAIs must demonstrate the ability to listen to stakeholders' opinions and perspectives on audit objectives, ensuring their participation through adopting a participatory style rather than one of simple unidirectional information exchange.


2.2.7.5 POSSIBLE TYPES OF STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

As stated previously, not all stakeholders are equally important for the successful outcome of the audit. Having the stakeholder matrix allows us to determine which ones should be heard or consulted, when, and in what manner.

Different types of stakeholder participation exist in an audit process based on the level of commitment desired:

The International Association for Public Participation has designed the so-called Public Participation Spectrum to assist in selecting the level of participation defining the role of stakeholders. Adapting this approach, which is more characteristic of a public consultation, to an audit procedure, we can represent stakeholder participation levels as follows:

FIGURE 5: LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE AUDIT



	GET INFORMATION	CONSULT	COLLABORATE	INVOLVE
OBJECTIVE OF STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION	Obtain a balanced and objective information that helps us to better understand the purpose of the audit.	Obtain stakeholders opinion on the analysis, possible alternatives or decisions to be taken.	Engage stakeholders at key moments of the audit to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are understood and taken into account.	Involve stakeholders in key aspects of the audit, from drafting possible audit questions to risk analysis or final cross-check of findings and recommendations.
ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS	Keep them informed of the results of the audit.	Listen to their concerns, aspirations, and provide them with information on how their input influenced the final drafting of the report.	Work with stakeholders to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are reflected in the final report, providing information on how their input influenced the final wording.	Target stakeholders for advice and innovation throughout the audit, with a commitment to incorporate their advice and recommendations into decisions as far as possible.

Once the level of stakeholder commitment is determined, the next step is deciding how stakeholder participation will be implemented, mainly distinguishing between two forms:

- Stakeholder Participation as a source of information or opinion: The goal is to receive information (facts, opinions, criteria, perspectives) from stakeholders on significant aspects of the audit scope. This involves acting, as indicated in the first two columns of Figure 5, obtaining information or consulting stakeholders.

Participation can be facilitated through working meetings, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, among other methods. For example, in an audit evaluating the effectiveness of a public intervention involving incentives for hiring through Social Security contributions reductions, understanding trade unions' and business organizations' opinions on the intervention's effectiveness or possible regulatory modifications to enhance its impact would significantly enrich the audit. Sharing reports, studies, or analyses related to the topic would also enhance the audit considerably.

- Stakeholder Participation in the **planning process**, results discussion, and follow-up on recommendations: In this case, actions align with the last two columns of Figure 5, collaborating and/or engaging stakeholders. Under this type of participation, creating an advisory or **consultative group** comprised of stakeholders with the highest interest and influence in the public intervention under audit is common. Establishing such an advisory group is advisable for audits concerning public policies with impacts beyond the Administration, those with highly technical content (environment, health, education, social benefits, taxation, among others), when risks are identified that audit results and recommendations might be controversial or contested, or when ensuring access to all necessary information is crucial.

2.2.7.6 HOW TO REFLECT STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN THE REPORT

The results obtained due to stakeholder participation in the audit process must be reflected in the Results section of the report. This section should outline the involvement of stakeholders, the selection criteria, and the nature of their participation. It should document the outcomes of meetings, surveys, and questionnaires, including major contributions, opinions, provided information, and any other data enriching the audit.

Additionally, it is essential to establish a contradictory procedure. Once the draft report is prepared, the section or heading related to stakeholder contributions should be sent to the stakeholders for their feedback. This process allows stakeholders to provide their insights and ensures that the report accurately represents their contributions.

3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION APPLIED TO PERFORMANCE AUDIT

3.1. QUALITATIVE TOOLS

The qualitative approach analyses categories, valuations, motivations, structures, and dispositions of individuals and social groups regarding a given social reality, in what has also been called the structural perspective (Ibáñez, 1994). When collecting qualitative data, non-numerical information is obtained, helping understand not only the "what" but also the "why" and "how" of a public intervention.

In the context of performance audit with an evaluative approach, qualitative analysis includes a wide range of tools to obtain, structure, compare, compile, and describe information related to the audited public intervention. It provides arguments related to the evidence supporting the audit's results and conclusions.

It is essential to consider the concept of triangulation, which involves contrasting and verifying results from different perspectives and sources. This mechanism can be implemented at various stages of the process and indicates how similar the results would be if a different approach were adopted. Different types of triangulations can occur based on researchers, information sources, informants, data collection techniques, different perspectives or moments, quantitative or qualitative theories or methodologies.

Therefore, the qualitative tools described below are complementary and not mutually exclusive. They should be used based on criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and timeliness, considering available resources and the expected time for the audit.

3.1.1. WORK MEETINGS AND INTERVIEWS

3.1.1.1. WORK MEETINGS

A work meeting is defined as a gathering of a specific number of people who exchange opinions and knowledge about the meeting's subject for a set period.

In the context of performance audit with an evaluative approach, a work meeting is a qualitative tool where the responsible individuals or managers of the audited public intervention are convened for the following purposes:

- Explaining the audit's guidelines, the objective, subjective, and temporal scopes, and how the communication flow between the audit team and the managers will be during fieldwork. This involves clarifying doubts about the audit's development.
- Obtaining data, information, and documentation about their competencies and the execution of their functions.
- Validating the most significant results achieved during fieldwork, presenting arguments and criteria, clarifying doubts, and gaining insights from the entity.

Work meetings can yield high-quality information concerning data collection, validation of analysis and data, and understanding viewpoints and opinions. Maintaining open dialogue with the entity is fundamental, as indicated in Standard 58 of *ISSAI 3000 – Performance Audit Standard*⁹, which states, "Effective dialogue with the audited entity is essential during the audit process for the realization of governance improvements, as it can increase the audit's impact (...)".

To achieve the objectives of the meeting, it is crucial to plan the topics and issues to discuss, prepare questions, and determine the necessary documentation. Providing attendees with an agenda well in advance enables them to prepare the meeting.

Several work meetings should be conducted throughout the audit process to achieve its objectives. However, these meetings need to be planned during the preliminary work phase, during fieldwork, and in the final phase of the audit to validate the key facts supporting the incidents underpinning conclusions and potential recommendations in the report.

⁹INTOSAI (2019d).

3.1.1.2. INTERVIEWS

An interview is a qualitative research technique involving asking questions to converse with respondents and gather data about a topic. In most cases, the interviewer is an expert trying to understand respondents' opinions through a series of well-planned and executed questions and answers.

The *Implementation Manual of ISSAI Performance Audit* (IDI, 2021) defines an interview as a question-and-answer session designed to obtain specific information and appropriate evidence in the case of performance audit.

Interviews can serve various purposes:

- Obtaining qualitative information: Understanding the involved actors' value judgments on the most effective or problematic actions, perceived difficulties, and the adequacy and relevance of the analysed public intervention.
- Explaining the logic of public intervention: Especially when the interviewee is a political leader.
- Collecting different types of opinions and facts: Facts and fact verifications, opinions and viewpoints, analyses, proposals, or reactions to initial hypotheses, among others.
- Identifying problems, deficiencies, needs, and necessary improvements.

To optimize interview results and obtain the needed information, it is crucial to design appropriate questions to achieve:

- The interviewee's perspective and observations.
- Documents, information, or data provided by the interviewee.
- References to other people or offices for additional information.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS:

- **Structured Interview:** In structured interviews, questions are predetermined based on the required information. The auditor uniformly asks these questions. Typically, these questions are closed-ended, offering the interviewee a list of possible answers. This approach is suitable if you want to quantify responses as they can be statistically aggregated, analysed collectively, and compared.

Example: What problems, if any, does the labour market in Spain face?

- a) Regulatory dispersion.
- b) Distribution of competencies in employment policies between the State and the Autonomous Communities.
- c) High unemployment rates in certain sectors: individuals over 52, women, youth, and the unemployed.
- d) Efficient use of resources from the European Social Fund.
- e) Others (specify and explain why).

- **Unstructured Interview:** Unstructured interviews aim for a discussion where the interviewee's observations and knowledge are essential. Questions are not predetermined and are open-ended, allowing the interviewee to respond as they see fit. Questions are flexible, following the flow of the conversation.

Example: What modifications, if any, should be made to the policy of encouraging employment for individuals over 52 years old?

- **Semi-structured Interview:** Semi-structured interviews are a combination of structured and unstructured types. They provide the auditor considerable flexibility while maintaining a basic structure. Hence, they include predetermined, open-ended, and closed-ended questions, offering a balance between structure and flexibility.

Depending on the number of interviewees, interviews can be classified as individual or group dynamics, where information is gathered from more than one participant simultaneously.

3.1.2. FIELDWORK/ON-SITE CHECKS

The fieldwork phase begins after completing preliminary work and designing the audit plan. During fieldwork, detailed compliance and substantive tests specified in the working programmes¹⁰ are conducted. The results may reveal facts or circumstances considered limitations to the audit scope, uncertainties, deficiencies, or irregularities, documented in the corresponding working papers.

The most significant qualitative tools used during the fieldwork phase include:

- Direct Observation, On-Site Checks, and Physical Inspection: These tools systematically and carefully observe the operation, management procedures, control systems, or any other aspect of the audited public intervention. These methods provide direct evidence of how the public intervention is implemented in practice, allowing the contrast of information provided by managers with reality. Direct evidence is considered one of the most solid and reliable forms, contrasting with indirect evidence provided by audited entities or third parties. They also provide information on aspects on which it is not necessary or possible to obtain this information through interviews or working meetings.
- Documentary Analysis: This involves collecting and analysing various types of documents (economic, financial, budgetary, accounting records, contracts, minutes, circulars, diaries, manuals, statistics, protocols, regulations, media reports, etc.) in the context of the audited public intervention.

Documentation mainly comes from the audited entity. However, obtaining web-based documentation and information is becoming more common, although these sources are associated with a higher risk of unreliable or outdated data.

3.1.3. MEETINGS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

As mentioned earlier, IDI (2017) advocates effective collaboration with stakeholders as a means to achieve greater impact of audits. For instance, in conducting a performance audit focusing on a public intervention programme aimed at optimizing spending on medications and investing in

¹⁰ The Audit Rules of the Court of Audit define a work programme as: An orderly set of evidence to be carried out by team members in order to obtain adequate and sufficient evidence in relation to an area of control. The programmes must be drawn up in accordance with the technical guidelines and the planning memorandum.

high-tech equipment in the National Health System, the following stakeholders might be involved:



Participation of stakeholders can be facilitated as a source of information or opinion or by creating an advisory group that participates in one or more phases: planning, discussing results, and following up on recommendations.

If stakeholder participation is facilitated as a source of information or opinion, meetings would need to be scheduled with each stakeholder to gather data on the effectiveness of the public intervention, possible deficiencies, improvements, and regulatory modifications to increase outcomes and impacts. Additionally, reports, studies, or analyses conducted on the subject could be requested.

In the example provided, the advisory group could consist of representatives from different stakeholders. Issues discussed in the group could include:

- Pricing of medications.
- Rational use of medication.
- Public procurement and medication purchases.
- Logistics and dispensing of medications.
- Inventory management and the need for high-tech equipment and technological materials.
- Human resource needs in the National Health System.
- Cooperation and information flow with Autonomous Community Health Systems.

When setting up an advisory group, decisions need to be made regarding the number of members, the number, location, and duration of meetings, potential compensation for group members (transportation costs, allowances, accommodation, remuneration, etc.), and the personal and material resources dedicated to organizing and managing the group (member search and selection, contact, documentation, archiving, meeting organization, follow-up, etc.).

3.1.4. GROUP SESSIONS WITH EXPERTS. EXPERT PANEL

INTOSAI GUID 9020 considers the involvement of experts in different subjects justified by the scientific and interdisciplinary nature of subjects addressed in the evaluation of public policies.

An expert panel can be defined as a group of independent and reputable specialists in at least one field related to the public intervention being audited, convened to provide a collective and consensus judgment on said intervention. Depending on the request, the judgment issued can refer to the implementation or the effects of the whole or a part of the intervention.

This tool is very useful for purposes such as:

- Interpreting primary data obtained from the audited public intervention and dismissing less plausible data.
- Generating consensus, identifying and overcoming resistance and obstacles in the work's development.
- Advising on audit planning and the execution of tests to be performed.
- Enhancing credibility and legitimacy in obtaining the conclusions reached, the recommendations to be made, and in estimating the possible effects and impacts of the public intervention.
- Identifying lessons and best practices based on the data collected during the audit and their own experience.

The composition of the expert group and its operating rules (number - usually between 6 and 8 members, scheduling, frequency and duration of meetings, support personnel and materials, or compensation, among other issues) should be planned.

The selection procedures for experts must meet the same requirements regarding professionalism, rigour, and independence applied to auditors and require them to fulfil the same professional obligations (especially in terms of confidentiality).

This working group, specifically established for the audit according to a series of standard procedures, follows a specific working method for its meetings, written contributions, and judgment to ensure no hierarchical relationships among experts are established. This minimizes the risk of omitting minority opinions or corporate positions that exceed the working group's scope.

3.1.5. UTILIZATION OF AUDIT REPORTS, EVALUATIONS, PREVIOUS ACADEMIC STUDIES, AND CASE STUDIES

The Standards of Audit of the Court of Auditors establish that: "The results of other internal or external audit work related to the objectives of the audit may be used when such work has been carried out in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. In this case, the effect that the use of such work will have on the scope of the planned tests will be determined. This use will be recorded in the report."

What is established in this rule can be extrapolated to the use of any report, evaluation, and academic study conducted on the audited public intervention. By using these tools, very useful information is obtained about how the authors of the work have approached them, the methodology used, the criteria and interpretations followed, the analysis methods used, the tests carried out, the sources of information they are based on, and the procedures for data collection, conclusions reached, and, if applicable, recommendations made.

A case study is a technique that involves comparatively analysing significant and strategic examples of the functioning of a public policy, using qualitative data collection techniques (mainly individual and group interviews and observations) to obtain the most accurate and complete information possible from the chosen cases.

The study is mainly used to illustrate, explore, verify the influence, and deepen the conclusions of the audited public intervention.

For this tool to be effective, it is very important to make an optimal selection of the cases to be studied and compared, defining in detail the inclusion/exclusion criteria of the cases based on the objectives of the audit, limiting the risk of bias in the selection.

Furthermore, *INTOSAI GUID 9020* contemplates the possibility that the SAI considers "existing evaluations on the subject in question. In this case, the SAI examines, or reviews evaluations conducted by other entities. This type of examination is called "**meta-evaluation**," and it is used to determine the usefulness, relevance, systematic nature, and accuracy of one or more evaluations. It is also possible to summarize the results of different evaluations considered to be of sufficient quality. Additionally, in some countries, the public administration evaluates its own policies and programmes: the role of the SAI may consist in examining the evaluation carried out by ministries and public bodies in terms of thoroughness, validity, and approach. This examination can take the form of an audit of the evaluation of the results obtained or an advisory mission for the mentioned ministries and bodies".

Meta-evaluation provides synthetic information about the existing knowledge regarding a specific public policy or programme, avoiding the need for a new study on the subject by the audit team, starting from the available knowledge. However, conducting meta-evaluations presents some difficulties, such as the availability of a convenient number of evaluations, with homogeneous methodologies based on adequate and sufficient information.

3.2. QUANTITATIVE TOOLS

3.2.1. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS AND ITS APPLICATION TO PERFORMANCE AUDITS WITH AN EVALUATIVE FOCUS

The appropriate choice and application of data collection and analysis methods are essential in evaluation and must be carried out based on the evaluation questions and the available resources. Based on the evaluation matrix and the available information, data collection must be matched with evaluation questions to detect and prioritize data deficiencies that need to be corrected by collecting new data.

Collecting the same information using different methods to increase data accuracy is known as **method triangulation**. Evaluators use it to strengthen their findings. **The more information collected supports a finding, using different methods, the stronger the evidence.** Other types of triangulations include source triangulation, involving collecting the same information from multiple sources to increase data accuracy, or evaluator triangulation, in which several evaluators collect the same information to increase accuracy.

This will help confirm that the planned data collection (and cross-referencing existing data) will cover all key evaluation questions, determine if there is sufficient triangulation among different data sources, and assist in the design of data collection tools to ensure they gather the necessary information.

Moreover, the feasibility of the chosen data collection methods within the limits of the evaluation's timeframe and resources is crucial. As Morra and Rist (2010) point out, it is common to use more than one data collection approach to answer different evaluation questions or to provide multiple data sources in response to a single evaluation question. For example, in an evaluation, data available from farmers' crop production records can be collected, buyers of the crop products can be interviewed, case studies can be conducted to develop topics for a questionnaire, or explanations of survey results can be found.

Among the data collection tools, the following can be found (Morra and Rist, 2010), although not all are applicable to audits conducted by an External Audit Institution:

- Participatory Data Collection: Examples of this tool include community meetings, which allow asking questions, comments, and discussing issues of importance to the community; mapping or the use of existing drawings and maps for data collection; transversal walks, a type of walk to observe people, surroundings, and resources of a community.
- Record Analysis and Secondary Analysis: Organizational records from official agencies, professional associations, and other organizations are a common source of information for evaluation. Secondary data sources include not only datasets from previous data collection activities but also newspaper articles, television presentations, websites, blogs, and online discussion groups.
- Observation: This tool is useful when the purpose of the evaluation is to collect data for reference and descriptive standards or to document programme activities, processes, and products (e.g., traffic patterns, land use patterns, urban and rural environment designs, housing quality, road conditions, or who attends a rural medical clinic).
- Surveys and Interviews: As previously discussed for interviews, and as will be seen later for surveys, the objective is to produce information that can be used to answer evaluation questions.
- Focus Groups: A quantitative evaluation tool in which small groups of people gather to discuss specific topics guided by a moderator, who leads discussions and probes or asks additional questions as the situation requires.
- Diaries and Self-Report Checklists: A diary (or log) is a self-report written by a participant, usually maintained daily. Diaries are used to capture detailed information about people's daily lives (e.g., health behaviour, study habits, or use of social networks). A checklist or control list is a cross between a questionnaire and a diary. Participants are asked to track a specific set of activities or events, listed so that respondents can easily check them off.
- Expert Judgment: With this tool, pre-established professional criteria and procedures can be used, or these can be for specific purposes. With pre-established criteria, these are usually published standards and instruments that ensure that experts ask questions and evaluate in a consistent manner.

- **Delphi Technique:** Allows experts to dialogue and reach consensus through an iterative process. It produces information and opinions from participants to facilitate problem-solving, planning, and decision-making without participants confronting each other personally.

Another aspect to consider is the effective management of data, which involves developing efficient processes for systematic data collection and recording, secure storage, data cleansing, data transfer (for example, between different types of software used for analysis), effective presentation, and data accessibility for verification and use by third parties.

Analysing data to summarize them and look for patterns is a crucial part of any evaluative audit. Data analysis strategies and methods for synthesis should be defined in the audit's design phase, tailored to the type of evaluation questions, and fully described in the planning phase.

For descriptive evaluation questions, there are numerous analysis options. Following Peersman (2014), these can mainly be grouped into two categories: options for quantitative data (numbers) and options for qualitative data (such as text), as outlined in the following table:

NUMERICAL ANALYSIS
Analyze numerical data such as cost, frequency, or physical characteristics. Some options are:
Correlation: statistical technique to determine the degree to which two or more variables are related.
Cross tabulations: obtain an indication of the frequency of two variables (e.g., gender and frequency of school attendance) occurring at the same time.
Data and text management: automated computer techniques that review large amounts of text or data to find new patterns and information.
Exploratory techniques: take a "first look" at a data set, summarizing its main features, often using visual methods.
Frequency tables: place data values collected in ascending order of magnitude, along with their corresponding frequencies, to ensure a clearer picture of the data set.
Central trend measures: synthetic measure that attempts to describe a data set with a single value representing the medium or center of its distribution.
Dispersion measures: synthetic measure that describes how values are distributed around the center.
Descriptive multivariate: provides simple summaries of (large amounts of) information (or data) with two or more related variables.
Non-parametric inferential: data that is flexible and does not follow a normal distribution.
Parametric inferential: carried out on data following certain parameters. The data shall be normal (i.e., the distribution is parallel to the bell curve); numbers can be added.
Statistical summary: provides a quick summary of the data, which is especially useful for comparing one project to another, before and after.
Time series analysis: observes well-defined data obtained by repeated measurements over time.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Analyze words, oral or written, including answers to questionnaires, interviews, and documents. Some options are:

Content analysis: reduces large amounts of unstructured textual content to manageable data relevant to research questions (assessment).

Thematic coding: record or identify passages of text or images related to a common theme or idea, allowing the indexing of text into categories.

Narratives: construction of coherent narratives of the changes that occurred regarding a person, a community, a place, or a programme or policy.

Schedules: a list of important events sorted in chronological order.

For key causal evaluation questions, Peersman (2014) primarily identifies three approaches to causal attribution analysis (ideally combining them to determine causality):

- **Counterfactual approaches:** involve estimating what would have happened in the absence of the programme or policy; this implies using a control group or a comparison group.
- **Coherence of empirical evidence with causal relationship:** is based on identifying patterns that would be consistent with a causal relationship and then trying to confirm or reject the evidence.
- **Alternative explanations rejection:** relies on defining possible alternative causal explanations and then seeking information to determine if they can be ruled out.

Finally, it is worth noting that an effective tool for analysis and communication of evaluation findings is data visualization, i.e., representing data graphically to identify trends and patterns that might not otherwise be clear or would be difficult to discern.

3.2.2. SURVEYS

Surveys are the most commonly used data collection tools. They are typically employed to generate precise, generalizable, and quantitative information about the perceptions, opinions, or ideas of various stakeholders involved in the evaluation, as well as potential difficulties in the implementation of public policies or programmes. For their implementation, like in most data collection techniques, several issues need to be addressed, including sample selection, questionnaire design and administration, and data analysis using various techniques.

Regarding sample selection, as stated in the Public Policy Results Evaluation Guide by the Institute for Public Policy Evaluation (2020), the sample should be as representative as possible of the reference population in order to generalize about the population. In this sense, random methods best ensure sample representativeness. This means that any individual in the selected sample has an equal probability of being chosen. Concerning the selection of the sample size, it is advisable to consider that the larger the sample size, the lower the estimation error, and thus, the results will be more significant.

The questionnaire design, to align with the intended objective, must be carried out with a clear understanding of what needs to be asked and how to do it. In this regard, surveys can be structured or semi-structured:

- Structured Surveys: A range of response choices is included, from which the respondent selects one or more. The same questions are asked in the same way to all respondents, and they are provided with exactly the same options. Regarding how many response options to use, as Morra and Rist (2010) point out, for nominal responses, such as a region of a country, primary occupation, or age group, the number of responses should cover all possible options. When scales are used to indicate responses, the number of response options should generally be an odd number (3, 5, or 7), so that the neutral response is evident to the respondent. (Sometimes even-numbered scales are used so that the respondent chooses between a "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" rating).
- Semi-Structured Surveys: The same general set of responses is presented, but open-ended responses are allowed for some or most questions. These questionnaires are especially useful when the evaluator wants to gain deeper knowledge of reactions to experiences or understand why respondents hold particular attitudes. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the development of survey questions, according to Morra and Rist (2010), involves drafting questions and answers, selecting questions, developing the sequence of questions, choosing a survey design, and finally, reviewing, translating, and preliminarily testing the questions.

For the choice of survey administration mode, various considerations related to the topic at hand, available time and resources, or the target population need to be considered. Among the most common options are:

- a) In-Person Surveys: They have many advantages in capturing comprehensive information but come with the drawback of their cost and slowness.
- b) Telephone Surveys: If computer-assisted (CATI), they allow cost reduction and shorter times, although they are less suitable for addressing sensitive topics.
- c) Postal or Online Surveys: Their primary advantage is their low cost and the need for minimal staff in their implementation. However, they can have low response rates and errors in completion.

Once the survey is conducted and the data is cleaned, analysis is performed using various statistical techniques, whether descriptive or inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to study random phenomena with a certain degree of uncertainty. Among the most commonly used descriptive techniques are:

- Absolute and relative frequencies.
- Measures of central tendency (mean, mode, and median).
- Measures of dispersion (the most well-known are variance and range).

Regarding inferential statistical techniques, they attempt to answer questions such as: what variables influence the process? How do they do it? Can a model be obtained that explains the event and allows for the prediction of its behaviour? Among the main techniques of this type, which have an extensive literature, are the following:

- Impact methods.
- Linear regression.
- Logistic or ordinal regression.
- Cost-benefit analysis.

- Cost-effectiveness analysis.
- ARIMA model.
- Multilevel analysis.
- Frontier or efficiency models.
- Factor analysis.
- Principal component analysis.
- Multicriteria analysis.

3.2.3. COUNTERFACTUAL ANALYSIS AND CONTROL GROUPS

In evaluations aiming for an impact analysis, the goal is to demonstrate a causal effect, i.e., the aim is to measure the impact of a programme or policy on some variable of interest. There is a cause and an effect. The cause is the change in a policy or the implementation of a new programme. The effect is the result directly attributed to the policy or the new programme.

The difficulty in measuring impact lies in the fact that we can only observe what happened, not what would have happened without the programme. In different hypothetical situations, for example, in the case of reforming an existing programme, the counterfactual is what would have happened if we had continued with the old programme, or in the case of a brand-new programme where we are interested in estimating the impact concerning the absence of any public intervention. In these situations, the **counterfactual** becomes what would have happened if there had been no programme in operation. Furthermore, sometimes, as noted by Blasco and Casado (2009), for the same objective, there are several programmes in operation, or there is one that operates with different variants or implementation models. Therefore, the interest of the evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of a programme or model compared to the rest. For these cases, the counterfactual can be defined in any of the previous versions, depending on the evaluation question and the methodological approach to answer it.

Understanding the counterfactual is key to understanding the impact of a programme. Thus, if there were a correct representation of the counterfactual, estimating the impact would be more straightforward. **The impact of the programme or policy is the difference between the result observed with the programme and the result that would have occurred without the programme, the counterfactual.** In this way, the concept refers to those situations that did not occur but could have happened, given certain assumptions. As the counterfactual does not exist in reality (it is what would have happened in a different scenario), each evaluation explicitly or implicitly attempts to construct an estimate of the counterfactual to compare it with what happened.

Usually, the estimation of the counterfactual is represented by a group known as the control or comparison group. The **control group** consists of individuals or companies that did not participate in the programme, while the experimental or treatment group is the group being analysed concerning the public intervention and its results, i.e., those who participated in the programme. **To estimate the impact of the intervention, the experimental group is compared with the control group.**

It is worth remembering that for the evaluation to produce reliable results, the control group must be identical to the experimental group in all characteristics (observable and non-observable) except one: their exposure to the programme. Thus, any difference after the intervention can be attributed to the programme, as in its absence, the two groups would be equal. Therefore, the homogeneity

and similarity of both groups are essential to avoid statistical and other biases that may distort the results.

Each method used to construct the control group imposes certain assumptions under which it and the treatment group would be comparable. When these assumptions are realistic, the control group is a good representation of the counterfactual. But when the assumptions are unrealistic, the estimation of the programme's impact becomes biased. Therefore, it is essential to make explicit the assumptions involved in the evaluation methods used, including randomized evaluations (or experimental evaluations), simple difference method, pre-post evaluation, difference-in-differences evaluation, Matching, Propensity Score Matching (PSM), or regression discontinuity.

3.2.4. BIAS ISSUE IN ANALYSIS

In evaluations with an evaluative approach, the analysis of impact aims to determine whether a public programme or policy has achieved the desired outcome and impact. It is essential to obtain evidence that the observed results in beneficiaries stem directly or indirectly from the activities of the public intervention. The goal is to establish whether or not a public programme or policy has a measurable effect on an indicator variable of the outcome, and the magnitude of that effect. Moreover, it is common to attempt to isolate the effect of the public intervention, excluding the impact that other factors might have.

In this context, it is crucial to avoid biases, which are distortions in the analysis results due to factors unrelated to the actual effectiveness of the evaluated public intervention. Bias can arise from various sources, such as study design, sample selection, choosing individuals for treatment and control groups, measuring outcomes, interpreting data, among others. For example, if a study relies on a non-representative sample, the results might be biased towards a specific perspective and not reflect the reality of the general population.

3.3. HIRING EXPERTS AND EXTERNAL COLLABORATIONS

Human and institutional resources are a key element in implementing any strategy for implementing the evaluative approach in performance audits. The current professional profile of staff engaged in external control tasks is highly focused on the legal and economic-financial fields. However, **an approach linked to a vision closer to evaluation requires a more interdisciplinary professional profile.**

Despite the fact that in those audit institutions where the performance audit is present in their annual plans, there has been a clear commitment to the training and qualification of staff from a more interdisciplinary perspective, in many cases, to be able to carry out performance audits with an evaluative approach, specific skills that are not within the organization itself may be needed.

Therefore, it would be appropriate to rely on the support of external specialists or experts in various fields of the academic or professional field to reinforce the planning processes and the methodological aspects of this type of report. Collaborations involve not only researchers or academics with expertise in the subject to be evaluated or experts in the policies and programmes chosen, but also economic and social actors directly affected by the policy evaluated.

Even though the recruitment of experts and external collaborations can provide a different and enriching perspective on the programme or public policy that is intended to be evaluated, it is important to bear in mind that they also present challenges and risks, including the following:

- Associated Costs: Hiring external experts can be expensive, especially if specialized expertise in fields such as statistics, sociology, pedagogy, engineering, or computer science is required.
- Quality: Working with external sources can introduce a quality risk. It is crucial to ensure that external experts and collaborators have the appropriate skills and experience, and their work should be thoroughly reviewed and verified.
- Dependency: Overreliance on external expert opinions might affect the development and objectivity of the work.
- Conflict of Interest: External collaborators may have their own interests and agendas, which can influence their work and recommendations.

4. WRITING THE REPORT AND DISSEMINATING RESULTS

According to *INTOSAI* Principle 12, SAIs (Supreme Audit Institutions) should communicate effectively with stakeholders, ensuring the understanding of audit work and results, interacting appropriately with the media and engaging with stakeholders.

To this end, the audit report is an essential element and, in this regard, IDI (2021) highlights that **the purpose of an audit report is to communicate the audit results to the legislative authority, to the audited entities and to the general public.**

4.1. WRITING THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH AUDIT REPORT

4.1.1. REPORT CONTENT

From an evaluation perspective, the report should clearly and objectively present the conclusions of the evaluative approach audit report, based on findings and evidence associated with audit questions. It should incorporate the evaluation matrix and encompass the results of the entire process undertaken. Additionally, the report should include relevant recommendations.

Therefore, the report must maintain a logical sequence, including all essential elements of the audit, such as methodology, sources of information, and evidence of results. It should demonstrate the process of work done, essential for ensuring transparency and independence in its preparation.

Apart from the final report, it is fundamental to have an executive summary that identifies audit questions with an evaluative approach, describes the methodology used, and summarizes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the report. It should serve as an independent document where the reader can quickly grasp the main messages of the report.

According to Morra and Rist (2010), the body of the evaluation report should contain the following chapters or sections:

Introduction, which includes the following components:

- Purpose of the evaluation.
- Background information.
- Goals and objectives of the programme described by a model of theory of change.
- Evaluation questions.

Description **of the evaluation**, which includes the following elements:

- Purpose.
- Scope.
- Questions.
- Methodology.
- Limitations.
- Participants (advisory board, consulting company).

Findings, supported by at least some evidence, in whose presentation the authors should:

- Collect the findings so that the audience can understand them clearly.
- Include only the most important ones.
- Organize them around the study questions and the main topics or problems.
- Use diagrams, tables, and other graphic elements to highlight important points.

Conclusions, which are based on the professional evaluation of the findings and should refer to each secondary objective of the evaluation, and to the overall objective of the project, programme or policy. No new information should be provided in the conclusions section. Although sometimes there is some difficulty in distinguishing findings from conclusions, it should be noted that the findings describe what was discovered in the evaluation and can be related to compliance or non-compliance with some criteria, while the conclusions summarize what is deduced from the findings.

Recommendations, which indicate what the entity that has been evaluated or other stakeholders should do, avoiding overriding expressions that contradict the nature of the recommendation.

From an audit perspective, the IDI Manual (2021) proposes a structure with the following contents:

Executive Summary, which contains a quick overview of the main points and key messages of the report.

Introduction, which reveals, albeit not too extensively, the context of the audit, which helps the reader to understand it. It also includes the responsibilities of the various participating entities.

Audit objectives and questions, which are critical to understanding the purpose, nature and extension of the work carried out, as well as the important limitations to the objectives, scope and methodology of the audit.

Scope, which helps to understand what to expect from the report, what use can be made of the findings and conclusions, as well as the degree of trust that can be placed in them.

Methodology used to address the objectives. The methodology can be briefly described in the body of the report, adding, if necessary, further details in an appendix or annex. In the main body of the report, it should at least be mentioned and this should be done concisely: the methodology and approach of the audit; the sources, methods of collection and analysis of the data used; as well as any limitations on the use of them.

Audit criteria that have been developed and what their sources were, which allows for knowledge of the parameters used to judge performance.

Audit findings, which relate to the corresponding criteria and to the evidence gathered during the fieldwork. This link can be established by organizing findings according to audit questions. Each question can be converted into a section or chapter of the report, which contains the relevant findings.

Conclusions, in which the findings and information presented in the report are combined and summarized.

Recommendations, with the reminder that its characteristics respond to the acronym SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound.

In light of all the above, it can be stated that it **is crucial for the evaluative approach performance audit report to have a logical structure which is tailored to its needs, allowing the communication of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.** In addition to these content elements, **the report should include an executive summary** and as distinct parts, **an introduction section, establishing the context in which the work** is carried out; scope, objectives, audit questions, and criteria, as well as a section detailing the methodology used.

The importance of data visualization in the report should also be noted. Using graphics, tables, and other visual elements can facilitate the understanding of the information presented. Quantitative data can be presented in a more accessible and appealing manner through graphics, while tables can be used to display detailed results or comparisons.

It is logical that the structure and content of the report can vary depending on the specific policies and standards of the organization or institution conducting the audit. However, the structure mentioned here provides a general guide for writing an evaluative approach performance audit report.

4.1.2. MAIN ATTRIBUTES OR CHARACTERISTICS OF REPORTS

Regarding the stylistic nature of the report, shared by evaluations and other types of reports, including performance audits, the following features should be highlighted (IDI, 2020; INTOSAI GUID 3920¹²):

Comprehensive: The report should contain all the necessary, comprehensive, and unbiased information and arguments to address both the objectives and the audit questions. It should avoid accumulating insignificant or repetitive data concerning the same question. Essentially, it should contain sufficient and adequate evidence to support the findings, conclusions, and recommendations (if applicable) related to the audit objectives.

¹²INTOSAI (2019e)

Convincing: The strength of the report primarily derives from the audit process itself: the key questions, the object of the audit, the methodology used, the tools employed for data collection and analysis, the narrative structure, as well as the relative simplicity and limited length of its executive summary. However, the report's strength also depends on the consulted bibliography, which must be not only current but also relevant.

Timely: To enable the use of information by the entity or entities responsible for the plan, programme, or public policy, the government, the legislative body, and other stakeholders.

Understandable: The way a report is written significantly influences its readability. Reports should use simple and clear language, avoiding jargon and technical terms. Clarity is related to how the report is presented, how it is written, and how its reasoning is structured. The graphical presentation and formal simplicity chosen by the authors also matter a great deal.

Balanced: The report should maintain impartiality regarding tone and content. Findings should be presented objectively and fairly, in neutral terms, avoiding the use of biased information or language that could generate defensive stances or partial positions.

4.1.3. CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions are closely related to the usefulness and effectiveness of the evaluative approach audit itself and constitute its ultimate purpose. Their connection with communication, dissemination, and proposals is close and fundamental. This section of the report is where we refine the audit findings, highlighting how and to what extent the implemented policy or programme has impacted or transformed the initial context and situation, or if the policy implementation is effective. Here is where we should show where the evidence has led us and express a value judgment about the achievements of public intervention, comparing the initial starting point with the end, through the evaluation process. General conclusions about each evaluation criterion used, rationality, coherence, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and results, among other criteria, should be gathered and presented in this section. Therefore, conclusions constitute the essence of the report.

In summary, conclusions concisely and clearly summarize the main audit findings, identifying the most relevant aspects that emerged during the analysis. Moreover, they link the findings obtained in the audit with the goals and objectives set in the evaluated programme or public policy, highlighting whether the expected results were achieved or not. Conclusions explore the possible reasons underlying these results. They also point out the strengths and weaknesses identified during the audit, emphasizing the positive aspects of the programme or policy, as well as areas requiring improvement or changes.

Only if stakeholders consider that the audit results are justified can they be inclined towards using them to improve public programmes or policies.

4.1.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations should be based on the results and conclusions, supported by solid and objective evidence, and should be aimed at improving management through the development of future actions.

In their formulation, the following indicative guidelines on how recommendations should be considered:

- **Clear and concrete:** Recommendations should be clear, specific and easy to understand. They should avoid ambiguities and provide accurate guidance on what actions should be taken and how to implement them.
- **Realistic and achievable:** Recommendations should be feasible and realistic within the political, social and economic context in which public programmes and policies are developed. They should consider the limitations and resources available, as well as possible obstacles to their implementation.
- **Oriented towards improvement:** The main objective of the recommendations should be to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programmes and policies assessed, as well as identifying areas for improvement and proposing specific actions to address the deficiencies identified.
- **Contextualized and adapted:** The recommendations should be adapted to the context and specificities of the programme or policy evaluated and consider the needs and demands of the beneficiaries, as well as the objectives and targets initially set.
- **Prioritized:** although they should not be excessive, it is important to establish an order of priority. The most urgent or most impactful recommendations should be identified and highlighted so that decision-makers can address them in the first instance.
- **Accompanied by justifications:** Each recommendation should be supported by sound and reasoned justifications included throughout the report and should explain why specific action is considered necessary and how it is expected to contribute to the improvement of programmes and policies.

From a more ambitious perspective, recommendations could also suggest the possibility of changes regarding the achievement of objectives or even question the overall objectives, if it is within the mandate of the auditing entity. In this way, elements not considered in the formulation of the policy or programme can be explored, discovering unexpected relationships between various elements of the intervention, suggesting changes in actions to achieve the expected objectives and results. Also, it could be considered that the auditee should indicate whether they accept the recommendations made and how they intend to proceed with their implementation.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that recommendations will not be very useful if they are not acted upon subsequently through monitoring their implementation. One way to do this is to establish a system that allows stakeholders to track the implementation of audit recommendations, ensuring that, for each recommendation, the date, the person or entity responsible for action, and the response or progress are included.

4.2. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF EVALUATIVE APPROACH AUDITS

The communication and dissemination of reports are fundamental to ensure transparency, accountability, and institutional learning.

As stated in *INTOSAI GUID 9020*, a fundamental principle of public policy evaluation is the public dissemination of its conclusions. Likewise, *INTOSAI GUID 3920* on performance audit, cited earlier, states that SAIs must make their audit reports fully accessible; therefore, they must publish and widely disseminate their audit reports.

In the communication process, there are numerous elements to consider. One of them is the need to involve key stakeholders in the communication and dissemination process for it to be effective. This involves working collaboratively with the responsible parties of the evaluated programme or policy, as well as with beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders. The participation of these stakeholders can help ensure greater ownership of the results and promote their effective use.

Moreover, it is essential to develop a communication strategy or plan to ensure clear and organized dissemination of the most relevant information related to the evaluation or the evaluative approach audit. This may include dissemination through media outlets, publication on institutional websites, organizing launch events, or presentation at conferences and prominent meetings. In this regard, to reach different audiences and facilitate dissemination, reports can be adapted to different formats and communication channels, including social media. In addition to written reports and executive summaries, infographics, explanatory videos, or visual presentations can be developed.

Communication not only involves conveying the obtained results, but also the information that must be transferred during the different stages of the audit. A key aspect of the communication process is determining who will receive the produced information. This identification allows us to present information according to the needs of each of the interested parties. The main recipients to whom the information should be directed include:

- **Policymakers and administrative officials:** interested in learning about the results of the intervention, as it can help them make future decisions and guide their policy decisions.
- **Planners:** they need general information about the strengths and weaknesses of the design.
- **Managers:** those to whom the audit allows to establish new mechanisms to improve the management of programmes or public policies.
- **Beneficiaries of the action:** the audit increases the transparency of the management and allows valuing the result obtained and the participation of the recipients in the audit process.
- **Opinion creators:** considered in the broadest sense of the term and not just journalists.
- **Society in general.**
- **Social networks and centers of dissemination and research.**

Communication plans should be carefully studied once the audit report has progressed, and its results and lessons learned are known. Subsequent findings should promote a culture of "lessons learned" in its teaching, improvement, and utility aspects, to promote the existence of support groups and generate positive reactions from the start. This encourages the use of findings more aligned with existing expectations.

Furthermore, communication should not just be one-way but should also allow for feedback and learning. Therefore, it is essential to establish channels for receiving comments, questions, and suggestions from recipients and stakeholders, as well as promoting debate and the exchange of experiences. In this regard, it may be interesting to monitor and evaluate communication and dissemination activities in order to understand their impact and effectiveness. This is highlighted in the aforementioned *INTOSAI* Principle 12, which recommends that the auditing entity "periodically evaluate whether stakeholders believe that SAs communicate effectively".

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METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE EVALUATIVE APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE AUDIT

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