

# **APPROACHES AND METHODS FOR EVALUATING THE RELEVANCE OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS IN CANADA**

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# Presentation Plan

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# Context

In 2013-2014, The Policy on evaluation (2009) was evaluated. This evaluation highlighted the difficulties associated with the assessment of program relevance and performance. Among other findings, the evaluation specified that departments and agencies are yet to fully complete direct spending reviews on a five-year cycle, due to workload and the resources required. In particular, it questioned the need of systematically assessing the relevance of programs in all federal evaluations.

The evaluation questioned the need to systematically assess program relevance in all federal evaluations. One solution proposed was increased flexibility in the requirements relative to relevance.

# Scope of the study

Our research focused on the three components of program relevance: 1) the extent to which a program addresses a demonstrable need and is responsive to the needs of Canadians ; 2) if there is alignment between the departmental priorities and the evaluated program's objectives; 3) to ensure alignment with federal roles and responsibilities.

# Objective

Describe in an empirical manner how relevance was measured in federal evaluations under the 2009 Policy on Evaluation in order to better understand the implications of increasing flexibility on the requirements of its systematic assessment.

# Objective

At the end of the presentation, I will give my personal view on the results of assessing program relevance and then highlight some significant aspects of the Policy on Results 2016.

# Research questions

## General question

How relevance was measured in federal evaluations under the 2009 Policy on Evaluation between 2009 and 2014

## Specific questions

Q1 : What specific approaches and evaluation methods have been used, under the 2009 policy on evaluation, to assess relevance in the evaluation of federal programs?

Q2 : To what extent do federal evaluations consider political and institutional issues in the assessment of program relevance?

Q3 : To what extent do the recommendations stemming from federal evaluations focus on program relevance? To what extent have these recommendations been implemented by departments and agencies?

# Definition of relevance

It can be considered from two angles: before and after the implementation of a program

Before: Is the program tailored to the nature of the problem / need identified?

After: Is the problem / need identified (a priori) still current and justifies the continuity of the program?

# Definition of relevance

For the Canadian federal government (Policy on Evaluation 2009), in addition to the notion of need (demonstrable and continued), program programming and objectives must be consistent with the institutional framework that governs their design and implementation :

Alignment with Government Priorities : Assessment of the linkages between program objectives and (i) federal government priorities and (ii) departmental strategic outcomes

Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities : Assessment of the role and responsibilities for the federal government in delivering the program

# Methodology

Exploratory approach : because program relevance has not been addressed significantly in previous research.



# Results

## Evaluation roadmap

Regardless of the aspect of relevance being assessed, our results show that the process followed is to systematically implement an evaluation strategy:

Firstly: a conceptual phase outlining issues and evaluation questions

<b>Reports</b>	<b>Issues</b>	<b>Evaluation questions</b>
Department of finance Evaluation of the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Initiative (December 2013)	Continued need of the program	Was there a demonstrable need for the federal contribution? Was there a demonstrable need for the projects that were selected?
Santé publique Canada First nations & Inuit mental health and addictions cluster evaluation 2005/06-2009/10 (September 2012)	Alignment with Government Priorities	To what extent is the MHA Cluster aligned with the Government of Canada priorities?
Department of Justice Legislative Services Branch Evaluation (Juin 2013)	Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities	To what extent do the activities of the LSB align with federal roles and responsibilities?

# Results

## Evaluation roadmap

Secondly: a methodological phase that concretizes and operationalizes the studies carried out so as to carry out the empirical phase: choice of methods of collection and collection

Qualitative methods	Limits	Mitigation strategies
Interviews et case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- tight schedule;</li> <li>- Lack of experience from program key informants ;</li> <li>- For some programs, opinion too favorable from informants, potential bias</li> <li>- For one program, no interviews with independent respondents with no interest in the programs were conducted. It is therefore possible that participants have a bias towards the program,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The main strategy used to arrive at a good reliability of the findings was to include several data sources</li> <li>- Triangulation of other data sources to provide additional information on the data obtained</li> </ul>
Documentation and literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incomplete or rare documents</li> <li>- Lack of information on some projects</li> <li>- Lack of baseline data</li> <li>- Little information available from departmental resource persons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Triangulation of other data sources to provide additional information on the data obtained</li> </ul>
Quantitative methods	Limits	Mitigation strategies
Surveys and online polling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The tight schedule;</li> <li>- Difficulty obtaining data</li> <li>- The findings are not always representative of the opinion of the general population</li> <li>- High nonresponse rate</li> <li>- Refusal to participate in telephone surveys</li> <li>- The survey, [...] although it provided useful information, was not randomized and only included a small sample</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On-site meetings with those who refused to participate in polls</li> <li>- Expanding the target population to increase the non-response rate</li> <li>- Triangulation of other data sources to provide additional information on the data obtained</li> </ul>

# Results

## Core Elements - Continued Need Assessment

Our analysis model shows that the evaluators insist on certain elements such as:

the correct understanding of the problematic situation: circumstances, events which are at the origin of the program:

**Federal Victims Strategy Evaluation** (February 2011): Rates of self-reported criminal victimization in Canada indicate that there is a strong continuing need for victim services and support. (Department of Justice Canada).

**Evaluation of Mountain Pine Beetle Program**(April 2011): The communities targeted by CEDI were highly forest-dependent and felt their well-being was significantly threatened by the mountain pine beetle. (Western Economic Diversification Canada)

# Results

## Core Elements - Continued Need Assessment

Identifying target populations

**Evaluation of the Computers for Schools Program**(March 2012) : Schools, libraries and Canadian not-for-profit learning organizations (Industry Canada).

**Evaluation of the Federal Interlocutor's Contribution Program and Powley Initiative** (September 2014) : the Métis and Non-Status Indian peoples of Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada)

In general, the target populations have characteristics that correspond to the mandate of the department responsible for running the program.

# Results

## **Core elements – Alignment with departmental priorities and government of Canada roles and responsibilities**

Our analysis model shows the highlighting of program objectives:

- Based on departmental or federal priorities and their anchoring in Canada's institutional system

### **Evaluation of the Economic Studies and Policy Analysis Division – (January 2012)**

«For example, one of the most recent economic initiatives of the federal government is the Economic Action Plan (EAP), as articulated in recent budget announcements and Speeches from the Throne.[...] (Department of Finance).

### **Evaluation of the Transportation Sector Emissions Sub-sub-activity (November 2012)**

«Government priorities stated in the 2011 Speech from the Throne,<sup>27</sup> international agreements and the Department's 2011-2012 Report on Plans and Priorities link enhanced economic development and the well-being of Canadians with the protection of all aspects of the environment, including addressing air emissions.» (Environment Canada).

# Results

Core elements – Alignment with departmental priorities and government of Canada roles and responsibilities

- Identifying different actors around the programs.

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Stakeholders</b>
Department of finance  Evaluation of the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Initiative (Décember 2013)	the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto
Industry Canada  Evaluation of the Community Access Program (CAP) — Final report — (October 2009)	federal, provincial and territorial governments, community groups, social agencies, libraries, schools, volunteer groups and the business community

In addition to these stakeholders, the evaluators mention more or less similar programs or initiatives that revolve around the programs evaluated. Evaluators note the influence that they may have (support or liability) for the programs evaluated.

# Results

## Results analysis

The evaluation reports highlight findings from the data collected using the various methods used by the evaluators. Recommendations may result

However, there are no reports that question the ongoing need and therefore the rationale for the program.

As for the concordance and the harmonization, they are more questioned: the evaluators highlight important elements such as overlaps, duplication, etc. which could have a greater or lesser impact on program activities. They propose adjustments if necessary

# Results

## Judgment on evaluation results

Given the institutional context in Canada, our position is that challenging programs is difficult on the basis of evaluations by the public administration, which (in Canada) has a limited mandate. At present, the decision to implement / terminate (or not) a program is political power.

On the other hand, the assessment of concordance and harmonization seems to be more important. Evaluators have the opportunity (and even the obligation) to issue evidence-based advice: program duplication, duplication, inadequacy with government policies and objectives

# Discussion

## 2016 Policy on results

Evolution of relevance assessment, 1992 - 2016

	1992 Policy on Evaluation	1994 Assessment Policy	2001 Policy on Evaluation	2009 Policy on Evaluation	2016 Policy on Results
Evaluation questions	Relevance	Relevance	Relevance	First core issue : Continued need for the program  Second core issue : Alignment with Government Priorities  Third core issue : Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities	Relevance

# Discussion

## 2016 Policy on Results

The focus is on value for money and performance.

The systematic relevance assessment is no longer mandatory.

The three aspects we studied are no longer specifically mentioned.

# Question

How should relevance be addressed  
in public administration?