

Terms of Reference (ToR) for impact evaluations

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questions and
methodologies**

Objectives



- Gain a clear understanding of the core elements and structure of Terms of Reference (ToR) for impact evaluations.
- Exchange experiences on the current status of impact evaluations across Interreg programmes, including early findings and methodological approaches.
- Identify priorities and focus areas for impact evaluations.
- Strengthen ability to formulate meaningful evaluation questions and select appropriate methodologies.
- Reflect on how impact evaluations can support strategic learning and preparations for the 2028–2034 programming period.



Understanding the building blocks of a ToR for impact evaluations

What shapes the ToR?



Opinions & expectations
(stakeholders, users,
decision needs, MC and
evaluation group expertise)



Evaluation plan
(purpose, key
questions, methods)



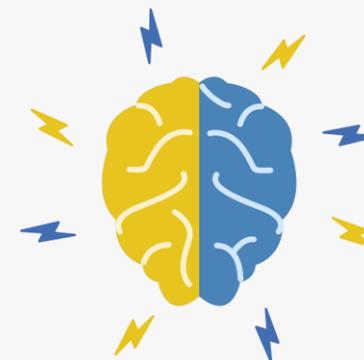
Budget
(what's feasible and
at what depth)



Expertise
(technical know-how
available/needed)



Procurement rules
(tender procedure,
thresholds)



Capacity
(time, data, coordination,
and management)

Purpose of ToR

Define the procurement framework

Ensure fair and equal competition among all bidders

Specify required services and tasks

Clearly outline scope and, where possible, quality standards

Enable accurate cost estimation

Allow bidders to calculate required resources and submit a solid, well-priced offer

Framework for procuring evaluation services

Public procurement is required when hiring external evaluators; the **available budget** should be defined in the **Evaluation Plan**.



Contracting approach

Decide whether to procure **all evaluation services at once** (single large contract / framework contract) or **separately** (e.g. implementation vs. impact evaluation).



Budget/price defined upfront

Procurement requires clarity upfront on **either the maximum available budget, or the estimated price** for a defined range of services.



EU vs. national rules

Above EU thresholds: EU Procurement Directive rules apply (via national rules).
Below thresholds: national procurement rules apply and **vary by Member State**

Specifying the tasks and services in terms of scope and quality



Usual fee rates for evaluation experts



Expected travel of experts



Number of person days that might be needed



Ensuring fair and equal competition means that the TORs are clear, concise and provide in principle all necessary information for potential bidders to submit offers that meet both formal and quality criteria.

Certified Training: Evaluation Practitioners

Calculate the cost of services (in number of person days)

Horizontal tasks

- Project coordination (senior: 10 / junior: 20)
- 6 in-person meetings at seat of MA with ESG (senior: 6 / junior: 6)

Task 1: Taking stock

- Data analysis and performance review (senior: 3 / junior: 15)

Task 2 Review of implementation proceeding

- Questionnaire development & agreement, phone/online interviews with wider programme management (10 persons), 10 beneficiaries (senior: 3 / junior: 10)
- Online survey among all beneficiaries (senior: 0.5 / junior: 2)
- Reporting on findings (senior: 1 / junior: 2)

Task x: Case studies

- 10 case studies (senior: 5 / junior: 40)
- 3 in person workshops with focus groups in 3 policy fields (senior: 5 / junior: 9)

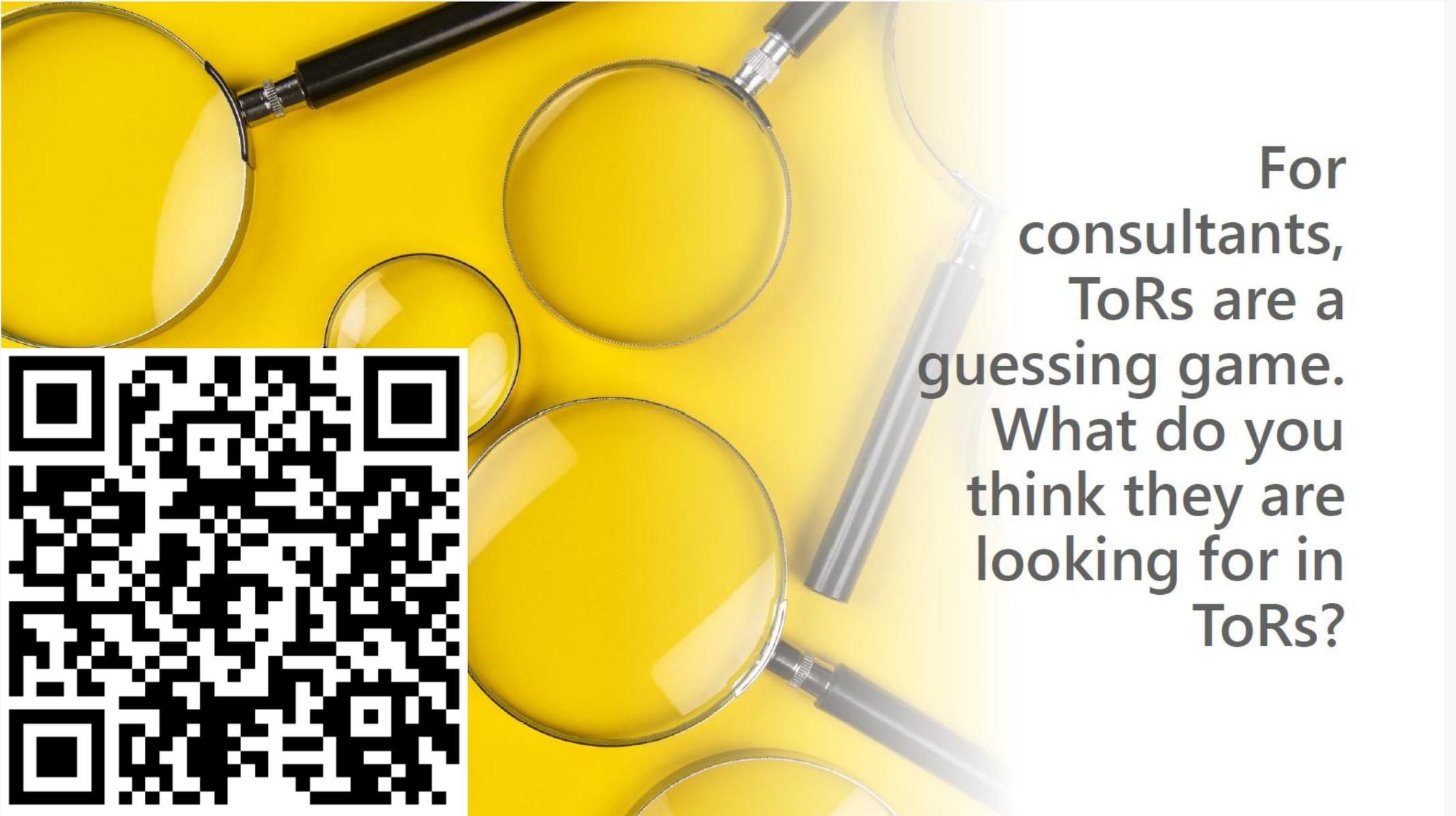
Task y: Reporting

- Interim report (senior: 1 / junior: 3)
- Final report (senior: 4 / junior: 5)

Structure of a ToR

In principle the basic structure of ToRs is always very similar regardless whether it is an implementation (operational) or an impact evaluation or a combination thereof.

- Background and context
- Evaluation purpose and target audience
- Evaluation objective and scope
- **Evaluation questions and tasks**
- **Approach and methodology**
- Timing and deliverables
- Evaluation team composition and required competencies
- Management arrangements
- Budget and payment
- Proposal submission



For consultants, ToRs are a guessing game. What do you think they are looking for in ToRs?

Go to wooclap.com and use code IADYGH

Start from the user perspective!

ToRs should be short! 5 to 10 pages is enough. Detailed information can go in the appendix

ToRs should be thought with their users in mind, **i.e. service providers**. What do THEY need to know:

1. To decide to answer?
2. To make a relevant proposal?

ToRs are a process:

1. Tell users in advance (evaluation plan for year X, PIN),
2. Use questions to clarify ToRs,
3. Offer possibility to counter-argument

What do you need to do to write good ToRs?

Definition of object: stakeholder mapping, problem definition, clarification of intervention's expectations

Consultation of potential users

Is there something to learn? What are the current concerns? Is there a decision to be made? Etc.

Initial portfolio review

What is there to evaluate? How does the current state of progress affect the evaluation?

Agreement on priorities

What is most important to evaluate? What is known already? What should be the focus?

Technical feasibility assessment

Is there data to evaluate, or can we access that data easily?

Simulation/planning of methodological approach

Do we have an idea of how this evaluation could be carried out?

Budget simulation

Do we have an idea of the cost of this evaluation? How does it fit into our budget?

Simulation of selection

What does good look like, what 'markers' of quality, how does this translate into criteria?

Consultation with procurement

Does it work – administratively, legally?

Evaluation starts before the ToR

In the process of commissioning an evaluation, there is a lot to learn already...

Which of the above do you usually do when preparing writing Terms of Reference?

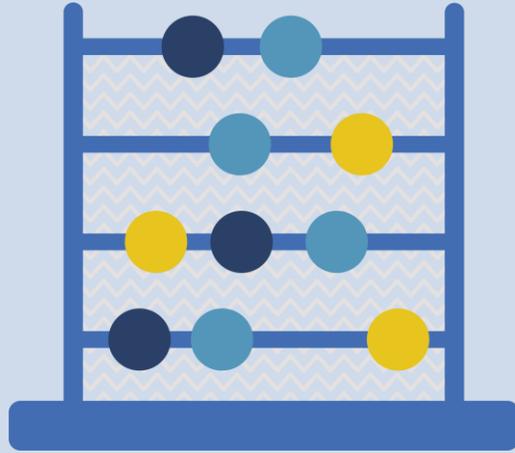
Which of the above do you think you could do more in the future, when preparing writing Terms of Reference?



Go to wooclap.com and use code IADYGH

Open Q&A: Procurement and ToR structure





Impact evaluation status quo and first findings

Analysis of the impact evaluations

Thomas Delahais, Evaluation Helpdesk



Overview of INTERREG evaluations

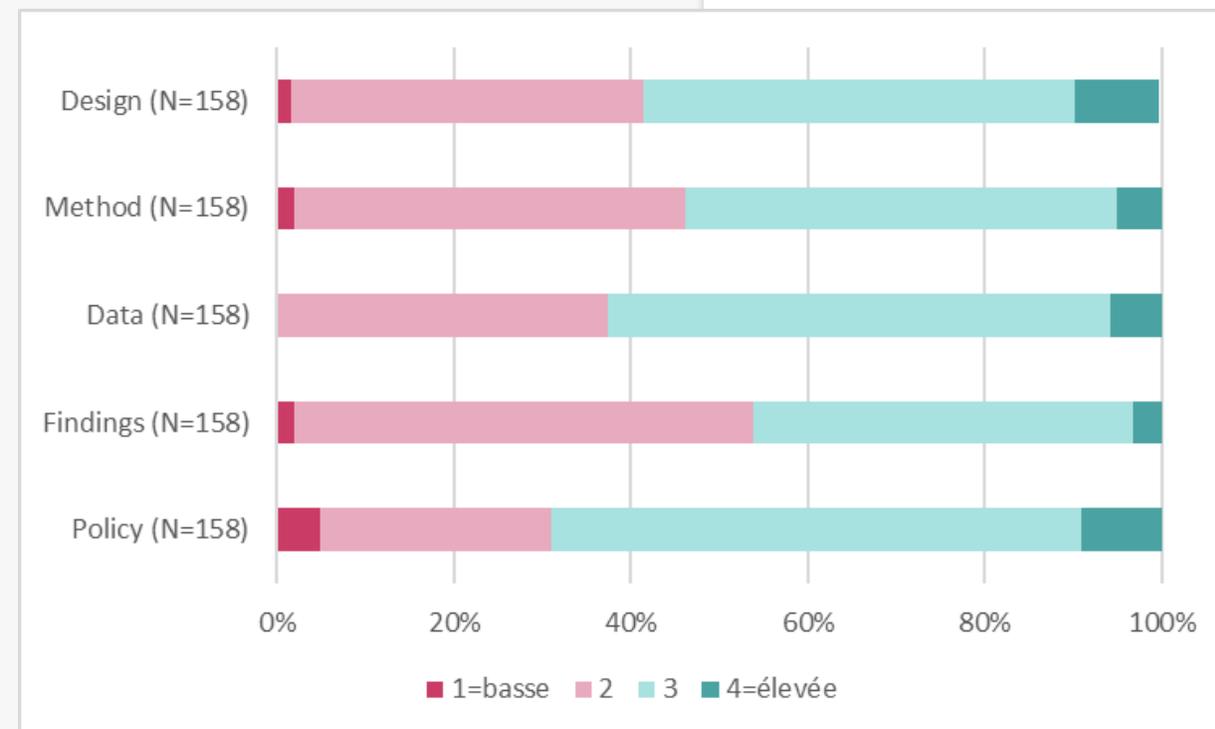
- 193 evaluations of which:
 - 120 are process-oriented
 - 109 are on implementation
 - 39 are impact evaluations
- 71% of evaluations are QUAL-QUANT

About the Helpdesk and the Evaluation Database

3,361 evaluations (2015-2026)

Five major criteria:

'Design', 'Methods', 'Data', 'Findings', 'Policy'



Features of good / bad INTERREG evaluations in database

Design	Methods	Data	Findings	Policy Conclusions
Comprehensive and well-structured design; clear and answerable EQs; explicit theory	Appropriate, well-described, well-applied Theory is used to support evaluative approach	Reliable sources Both primary and secondary data Limitations acknowledged	In response to EQs Clear Meaningful	Clear and actionable Based on analysis Address specific issues or stages
Lack of coherence No EQs No framework	Lack of clarity, gap between description and application. Overly descriptive	Sources not specified (no score 1)	Descriptive, not interpreted Focus on potential rather than concrete results	Just outlined Generic, vague

Major issues across evaluations

Approach:

- Only partially applicable / Without framework or theory
- Unable to assess impact

- transparent enough
- !! More is needed for robustness & causal analysis

Gaps:

- !! Between claimed and applied methods
- Between claimed and effective scope (lack of depth)

!! Insufficient **causal robustness** (link / context)

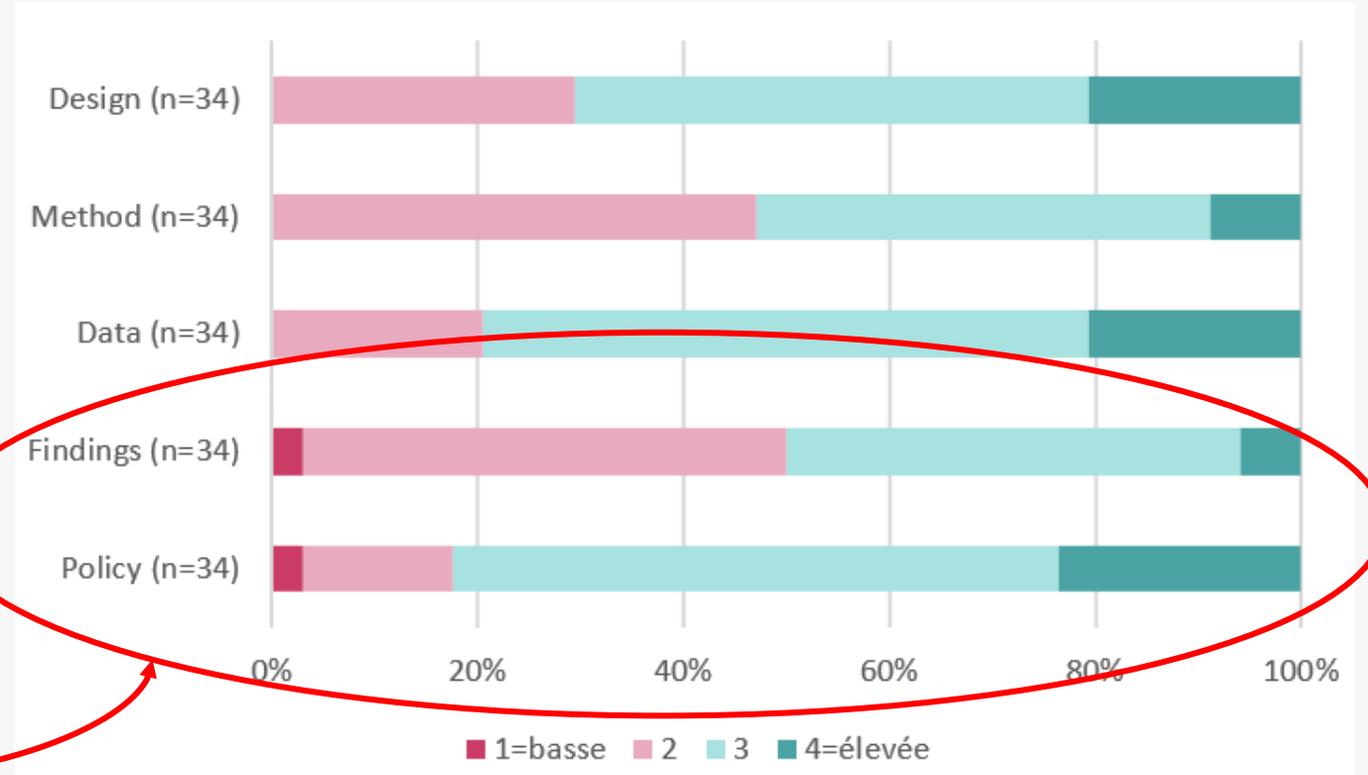
Data:

- Source and process not

Limitations of findings not explicit

!! Recommendations too **generic** / not contextualised

INTERREG Impact evaluations: better on all dimensions



The robustness vs usability of evaluation paradox: bigger than ever

Are impact evaluations of INTERREG... really about the impacts of INTERREG?

IE often discuss cross-border cooperation (2 out of 3), and capacity or innovation (1 out of 3). Broader impacts on policies or territories are rarely discussed

Main perspective is thematic: economic development, job creation, competitiveness, infrastructure ...

'Intangible' results too often described or claimed:

- Limited use of theory or framework
- Limited causal analysis

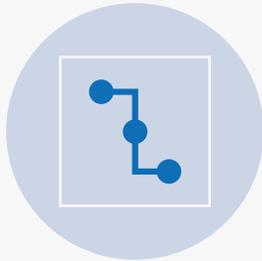
TBIE score higher...
but only 15% of corpus



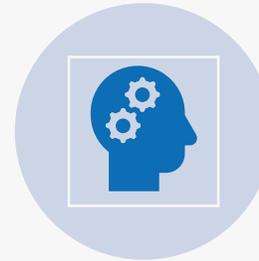
Group work outcomes



A few lessons for ToRs of Impact Evaluations



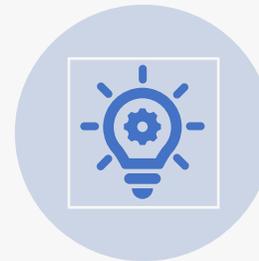
Better initial structuring / framing
Consider contexts



Simulating / prototyping methods before use



Invest in
Evaluability studies
Causal analysis



Require skills in interpreting data and making better recommendations

**Join the group – Evaluation
Helpdesk on Cohesion Policy**

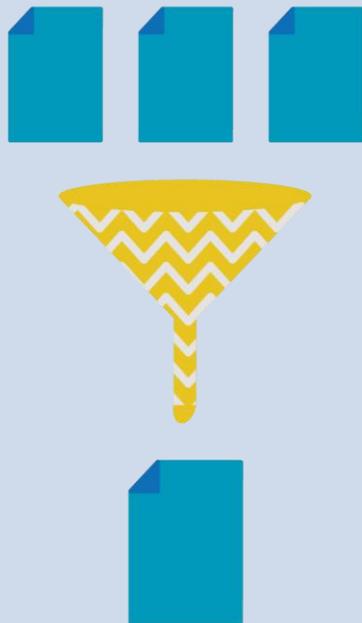
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14420317/>



Share the status of your evaluations

	Planning	ToR drafted	Implementing evaluation	Final report	Follow up
Operational Evaluation		Euro-MED HU-HR Peace Plus LV-LT	Central Baltic PL-SK		CE Interact
Impact Evaluation	Central Baltic Euro-MED CE LT-PL ES-LT HU-HR SK-CZ Interact	Peace Plus			
Mixed Evaluation	HU-SK HU-SK-RO-UA SK-AT SK-CZ	Danube Grande Region	BSR Grande Region (Operational)		Grande Region 1 st impact evaluation

Lunch



Choosing what to evaluate: priorities and focus areas



Strategies and criteria for prioritisation

What can be evaluated depends on the project stage: early stages focus on building awareness, pilots test and refine new ideas, and mature projects measure immediate and sustainable result/impact.



Strategic or policy importance

High relevance for future programming and decision-making.



Capitalisation potential

Strong likelihood of scale-up or broader rollout.



Large budgets

Significant financial allocation requiring accountability.



Innovative design

New approaches where evidence on effectiveness and implementation is still emerging.

Strategies and criteria for prioritisation – a few recommendations

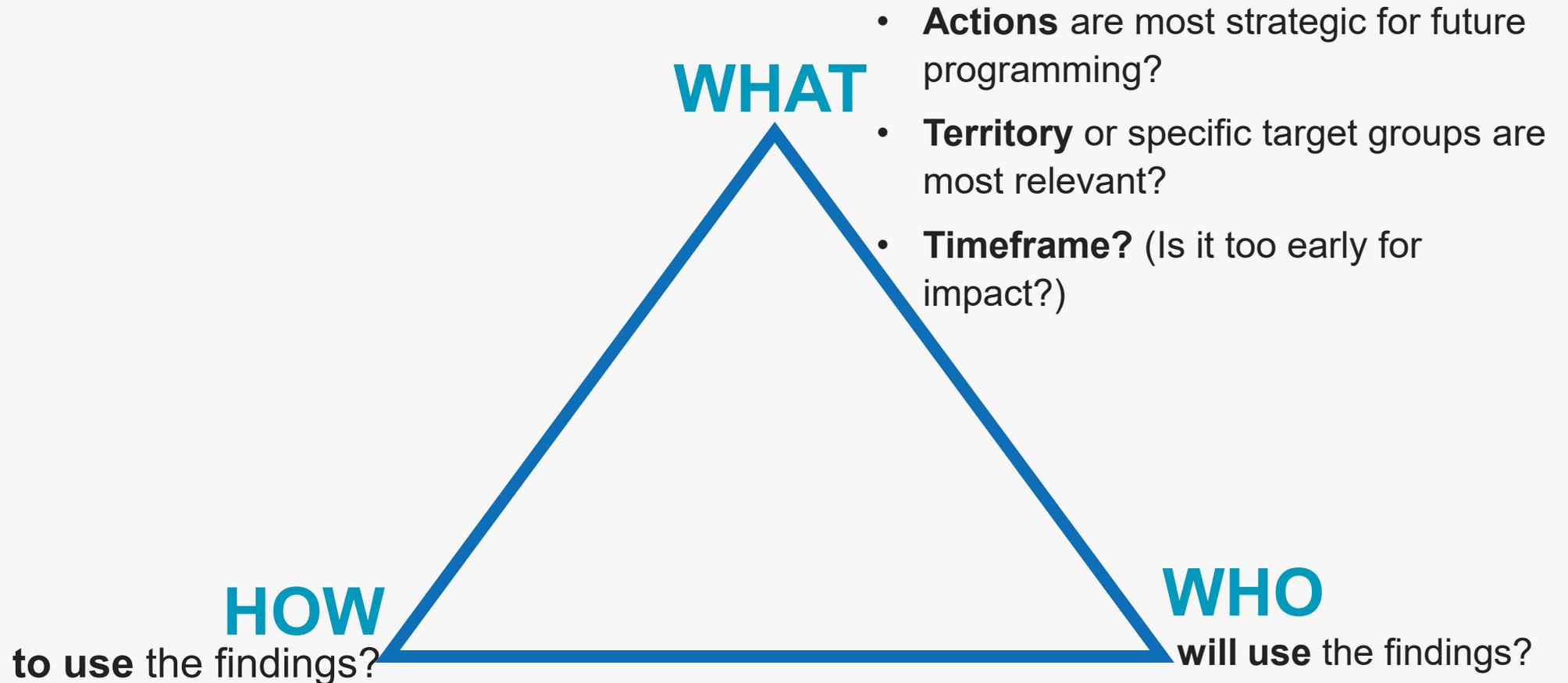
You can't evaluate everything

Focus resources

Concentrate on:

- What you don't currently know...
- And are genuinely interested in finding out

Group exercise: Mapping what – who – how?



Break



Shaping evaluation questions and methodologies



Core principles for defining evaluation questions

Defining evaluation questions and methods strategically ensures evaluations support **accountability** and **learning**, going beyond basic monitoring to assess real impact, cooperation, sustainability, and added value.



Strategic and relevant

Align with programme objectives and policy priorities, focusing on a few key questions that matter most to decision-makers.



Clear and feasible

Be specific, concise, answerable, and realistic given available data and resources (“less is more” rule).



Logically grounded (link to ToC)

Link clearly to the programme’s Theory of Change, showing how actions are expected to lead to results.



Learning-oriented

Go beyond outputs to assess outcomes and impact, asking questions that inform improvement and future policy.

Methodological approaches

Issues-led, not methods-led

Start from the key evaluation questions and challenges; select methods that best address the issues rather than pre-defining techniques.

Balanced and flexible design

Provide clear expectations on rigor and evidence, while allowing evaluators to propose the most appropriate methods for impact evaluation.

Mixed methods approach

Combine qualitative tools (interviews, case studies) with quantitative data (indicators, statistical analysis) to ensure a holistic view.

Learning from evaluations for the next programming period

Evaluation helps choosing among different actions and assess which ones should be KEPT, IMPROVED, STOPPED – or whether you need to START new things.

Evaluation works better when it is designed and implemented as part of the DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION and CAPITALISATION process – not as a distinct process

What do we want to KEEP?

What must be IMPROVED?

What could be STOPPED?

What should we START anew?
(or expand)

Coherence

Are other actors or programmes depending on us?

Coherence

Are we all going in the same direction?
Does it support EU and regional orientations?

Efficiency

Are there unnecessary burdens? Do they prevent people from benefitting from INTERREG?

Effectiveness

Does it work or not?
What requires time to show results?

What do we want to KEEP?

What must be IMPROVED?

Effectiveness

What works for whom?
What doesn't work and why?

Value added

Are there things that we are the only ones to do?
That we do better?

What could be STOPPED?

What should we START anew? (or expand)

Relevance

Are we addressing the right problems? Have the problems changed? Are we touching the right people / places?

Relevance

Are we contributing to status quo?

Value added

Are there things that others do better?

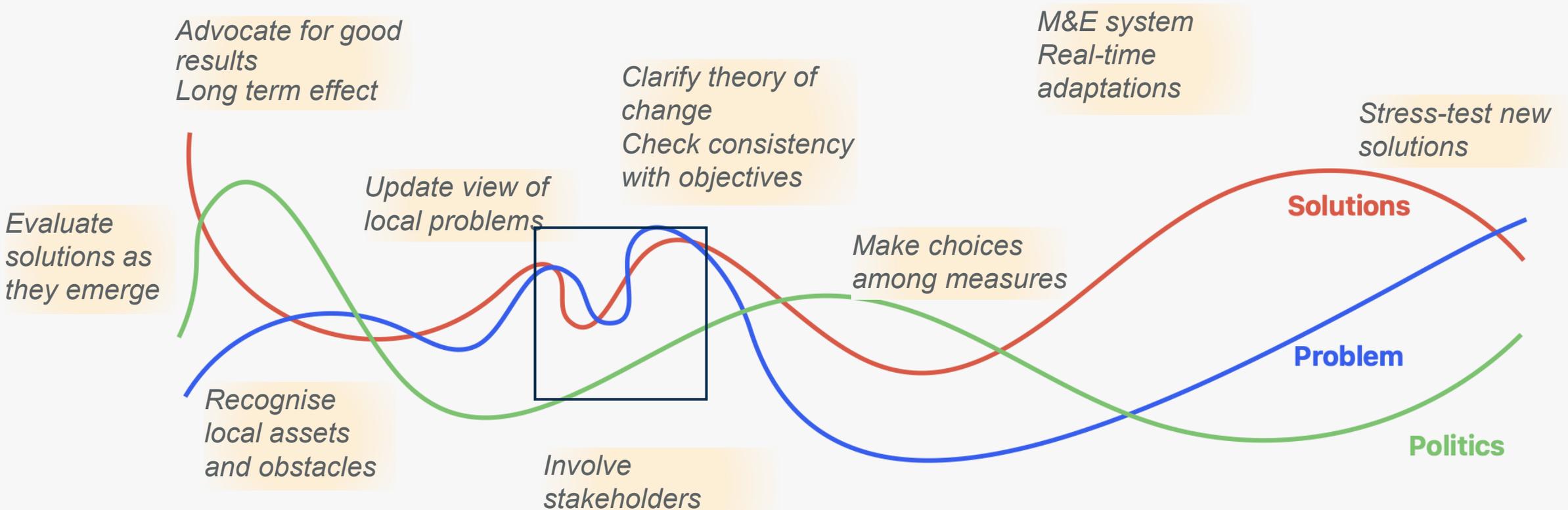
Relevance

What new problems might come next?

Effectiveness

What worked in innovations / experiments / new measures ? What can be learned from them?

Mainstreaming evaluation into programme design



Based on Kingdon (1984) and Howlett (2019)

Group exercise/discussion

How can impact evaluations support strategic learning and preparations for the 2028–2034 programming period?



Impact Evaluation as a bridge to 2028–2034

How evaluations can support the future design of Interreg programmes...

**Support the
shaping of the
intervention
logic
(measures,
indicators)**

**Assessing
2021–2027
specificities
(e.g., SPF,
ISO1, POs)**

**Demonstrating
added value**

**Informing key
decision-
makers**

Upcoming events

27 May

Harmonized approach to capture & highlight the added value of Interreg, **Ljubljana (SI)**

3 June

Harmonized approach to capture & highlight the added value of Interreg, **online**

TBD

Discuss indicator fiches for the period 2028-2034

June

PbA and indicators for the future, **online**

Upcoming trainings

25.2 – 25.3.2026

Certified training:
Evaluation foundation,
online

Mid/end March

**P-BA for beginners –
first edition**

5.11-3.12.2026

Certified training:
Evaluation practitioners,
(final meeting),
Germany

Share Point

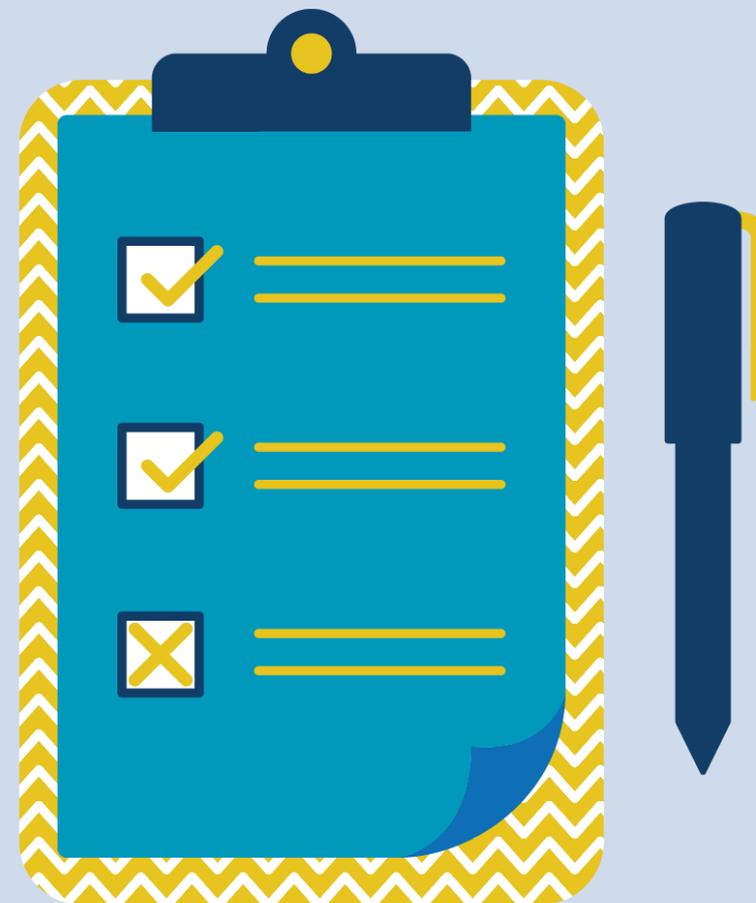
The screenshot displays a SharePoint site with the following elements:

- Top Navigation Bar:** Includes the "Interact" logo, the European Union flag with the text "Co-funded by the European Union Interreg", and the "SharePoint" title.
- Left Side Navigation:** A vertical menu with an orange square icon containing "PA" and the text "Programme and project management". Below it is a folder icon and the text "Evaluation and indicators".
- Right Side Content Area:** A list of folders, each with a colored folder icon:
 - Yellow folder icon: "All about indicators"
 - Orange folder icon: "Evaluation Plans 2021-2027"
 - Purple folder icon: "Impact evaluation (IE)"
 - Green folder icon: "Operational Evaluation (OIE)"
 - Grey folder icon: "Updates from the Academy_Evaluation Certified trainings"
 - Grey folder icon: "Updates from the Memeber States Evaluation Network"

Thank you for being with us!

Please leave us your feedback

Terms of Reference (ToR) for impact evaluations 5 March 2026 |
Marseille, France



Cooperation works

All materials will be available on:
Interact.eu/Library

Want to discuss it? Join our MS Teams environment!
Portal.Interact.eu | Programme and Project Management

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Evaluation and indicators

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