



External Neutral Assessment of the Evaluation Function

Natural Resources Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose: Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) engaged BDO Canada LLP as independent assessors to conduct a neutral assessment of the evaluation function pursuant to the 2016 Treasury Board (TB) *Policy on Results* (2016 Policy).

Methods: To conduct this assessment, we reviewed completed evaluations and documentation, and conducted interviews with NRCan officials from August 2018 to September 2018.

Conformance with the evaluation elements of 2016 Policy: NRCan's evaluation function is in general conformance (highest rating) with the requirements of the evaluation elements of the 2016 Policy.

Performance of the function 2016 to 2018: The Department has delivered the expected evaluations, plans and reports, and advice according to the TB Policies, Directives and Standards. The Performance Measurement Evaluation and Experimentation Committee (PMEEC) functions effectively. With regard to grant and contribution (G&C) programs, the function has delivered the required evaluations within the timelines required by the *Financial Administration Act* (FAA).

The Departmental Evaluation Plan (DEP) and individual evaluations meet the required standards. Considering its modest \$1.5 million annual budget, and the type of evaluations delivered, the function has delivered significant results. Approved actions in response to the recommendations made in evaluations have been tracked with rigour. The evaluation function has taken initial steps to innovate and to modernize the function through the application of the flexibilities provided in the 2016 Policy.

Usefulness: Select information and advisory needs of senior executives and program managers were met through consultative planning, implementation, and reporting of findings and recommendations. Evaluations have been used: to comply with the evaluation elements of the 2016 Policy; to comply with the FAA regarding G&C programs; as input to corporate planning and reporting documents; as input with other reviews for program and policy changes; as input to Memoranda to Cabinet (MCs) and TB submissions; and, to provide a published record of results achieved, as a component of NRCan accountability reporting. Although quality standards were met, there is potential for improvement through application of the flexibilities in the 2016 Policy. NRCan is aware of the flexibilities in the 2016 Policy and has started to use them.

Opportunities for improvement: We identified opportunities aimed at increasing the value-added of the function to inform strategic discussions and decision-making. Our key advice is to continue to focus the Departmental Evaluation Plan and specific evaluations and to align the overall plan and individual studies to departmental risks, priorities and strategic issues.

Recommendations: We have made four recommendations regarding: continuing to implement the flexibilities of the 2016 Policy in order to focus evaluations and align with risks, priorities and strategic issues; making evaluations more timely; seeking advice from the external member of PMEEC; and, ensuring strong understanding of program details by evaluators at the start of the planning phase.



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ENGAGEMENT BACKGROUND

Purpose

The Treasury Board (TB) *Policy on Results* (2016) requires a neutral assessment of the evaluation function every five years. The last neutral assessment at Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) was conducted in 2013.

The purpose of this neutral assessment is to assess conformance with the 2016 Policy with a focus on quality and use, and to recommend improvements regarding the evaluation function, as appropriate.

Issues

The following issues were identified for assessment:

- Conformance with the evaluation elements of the 2016 Policy and related Directive and Standard, with a focus on quality and use.
- Whether the function is adding value to NRCan, including:
 - Expectations of the function as expressed by Performance Measurement, Evaluation and Experimentation Committee (PMEEC);
 - Integration of activities from the evaluation function into NRCan's governance process;
 - Tools and techniques used by the function; and
 - Mix of knowledge, experience, and disciplines within the staff, including staff focus on program improvement.
- Opportunities for improvement.

Methods

Over the engagement period from August 2018 to September 2018, the neutral assessment team conducted the following activities:

- Reviewed documents, evaluation reports, NRCan and TBS websites;
- Conducted interviews with PMEEC Members, Chair of the Departmental Audit Committee (DAC), managers, and evaluators (26 people participated in interviews);
- Reviewed two evaluations and working papers as case studies;
- Reviewed and validated a self-assessment of conformance to the 2016 Policy on Results and related Directive and Standard; and,
- Assessed data with regard to the neutral assessment issues.

The period examined for this neutral assessment was from April 2016 to July 2018.

This neutral assessment was conducted in a manner consistent with Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) guidance.

CONSIDERATIONS

Changes to the Operating Environment for the Evaluation Function at NRCan

Over the period since the last neutral assessment, there have been significant changes to the operating environment for the NRCan evaluation function. These include: the election of a new government; the appointment of a new Deputy Minister; Treasury Board policy changes impacting evaluation functions government-wide; the establishment of a new governance committee at NRCan, the Performance Measurement, Evaluation and Experimentation Committee (PMEEC); and the merger with Internal Audit in December 2017.

New Treasury Board Policy with High-Level Attention to “Deliverology” Concepts

The 2016 Policy replaced the *Policy on Evaluation* (2009) and the *Policy on Management, Resources and Results Structures* (2010). At the same time as the 2016 Policy was approved, a new *Directive on Results* replaced the *Directive on the Evaluation Function* and the *Standard on Evaluation for the Government of Canada*.

The 2016 Policy permits more focused, timely and strategic evaluation of high-priority initiatives, issues and projects.

The new government published the mandate letters sent by the Prime Minister to Ministers. The August 28, 2018 mandate letter to NRCan lists ten top priorities. Results are tracked and published to Internet. Cabinet retreats are held to discuss progress regarding delivering results for Canadians. In addition, at the Privy Council Office (PCO), a Deputy Secretary to Cabinet (Results and Delivery) has been appointed.

Changes in the 2016 Policy: Strategic, Focused and Customized

The 2016 Policy has made several changes compared with the previous policy, directive and standard governing the evaluation function (in effect since 2009). Pursuant to the 2016 Policy, evaluations target departmental needs, risks and priorities. Grants and contribution (G&C) programs with average expenditures under \$5 million per year no longer require mandatory evaluations every 5 years. Coverage of 100% of spending every 5 years is no longer required; however, all spending should be evaluated periodically.

The 2016 Policy removed the mandatory evaluation issues for non-FAA required evaluations. This is intended to promote greater innovation and customization of evaluation approaches. FAA-required evaluations must cover relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Flexibility on the issues to be addressed means evaluations can focus on issues most relevant to NRCan.

The scope of evaluations can be focused, for example, by issue; by region; or, by time period. A phased approach can be adopted for evaluations. There is more latitude for evaluations to be tailored so that they are of highest value to the department and so that they can be delivered in a shorter timeframe to inform decision-making.

Now there is increased flexibility to conduct evaluations during a program’s design, implementation, and afterwards, using diverse types of evaluation.

Transitional Period at NRCan

The period since the election of the new government in 2015 has been a period of transition for many departments and agencies, including NRCan. During this period departments and agencies have been asked to develop a range of new programs. Programs that have been in place for a period of time are sun-setting and there is a decision required whether to renew, replace or modify these programs, or to allow them to expire.

For a number of programs, NRCan works with and relies upon other departments and agencies (e.g. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED), Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs - Indigenous Services Canada (CIRNA-ISC), etc.).

The evaluation function has a history of conducting outcome-based evaluations to assess the mandatory core issues of the 2009 Policy on Evaluation.

Advisory projects by the evaluation function regarding performance measurement and evaluation have been much appreciated by managers. Some NRCan evaluations included assessment of program design and program delivery issues.

The merger with internal audit in December 2017 has improved the profile for evaluation and facilitates innovation (and closer collaboration between internal audit and evaluation). The merger has led to the production of a joint summary plan for the evaluation and internal audit functions. The plan includes collaboration where practical for joint evaluation and internal audit projects. The plan includes the idea of coordination of data gathering for some projects in order to reduce the “response burden” on NRCan officials participating in these evaluations and internal audits. Interviews noted that while these innovations have significant potential benefits, there is a caution that some officials confuse evaluation and internal audit (this is a common misperception in many departments and agencies).

More Strategic Focus for Evaluation: Inform Decisions, Priorities and Strategies

There has started to be a significant change in evaluation planning after the issuance of the 2016 Policy. The aim is for the evaluation function to contribute in a timely manner to strategic discussions and to inform high-priority issues. Previous evaluation planning was focused on achieving the requirements of the previous (2009) policy for 100% coverage of expenditure over a 5-year period, addressing core issues (according to the 2009 Policy), and meeting TB commitments for evaluations. Now planning is more focused on risk, priorities and strategies.

PMEEC provides a forum at NRCan for department-wide strategic discussions that extend beyond a specific program evaluation tabled for approval.

FINDINGS

In this section, we present our findings for each of the neutral assessment issues:

- Conformance with the evaluation elements of the 2016 Policy and related Directive and Standard, with a focus on quality and use.
- Whether the function is adding value to NRCan, including:
 - Expectations of the function as expressed by PMEEC;
 - Integration of activities from the evaluation function into NRCan's governance process;
 - Tools and techniques used by the function; and
 - Mix of knowledge, experience, and disciplines within the staff, including staff focus on program improvement.
- Opportunities for improvement.

Conformance with 2016 Policy as it relates to Evaluation

The neutral assessment found that the evaluation function at NRCan generally conforms¹ (highest rating) with the requirements of the 2016 Policy.

Value to Senior Management

The evaluation function fulfilled the need of the Deputy Minister to meet the 2016 Policy requirements. In addition, select accountability, management information and advisory needs of senior executives and program managers were met through consultative planning, implementation, and reporting of findings and recommendations. Evaluation reports were produced pursuant to mandatory legislative and policy requirements or TB commitments.

Quality of Evaluations

Evaluation reports that have been completed at NRCan over the period since 2016 met standards for quality and rigour. Published reports were informative and well written.

The neutral assessment found that there is potential for continued improvement through application of the flexibilities in the 2016 Policy. NRCan is aware of the flexibilities in the 2016 Policy and has started to use them.

Timeliness

In past, many evaluations took a significant amount of time to plan, conduct, and report. Evaluations were often seen as routine projects and may not have received high priority from program management. This extended the time required.

¹ Conformance to the Treasury Board's *Policy on Results* requirements is evaluated using the following scale: "Generally Conforms" means there is no material deficiency, although there may be some minor deficiencies.

"Partially Conforms" means there is one material deficiency, and there may be minor deficiencies.

"Does Not Conform" means that there is more than one major deficiency in practice and these deficiencies are judged to be significant enough to seriously impair or preclude the evaluation function from performing adequately in all or in significant areas of its responsibilities.

NRCan programs, in particular science programs, may be rather complex. At times, evaluators may have required extra time to fully understand and appreciate the details of programs. At times, evaluations required significant time by the management of the program or delivery partners to provide required information and to review evaluation plans, data collection tools, analysis of results and draft reports. Final published reports met the required standards, but getting to the final report may have required significant time for review and discussion of data interpretation and draft reports.

Slippage in implementation of data collection, analysis of data, and reporting created delays completing evaluations.

Evaluations of contribution programs were completed in accordance with the deadlines set by the FAA and TB policies.

Evaluation management is aware of and sensitive to the need for evaluations to be timely, and available to inform discussion of priority issues and strategies.

Use

Evaluations at NRCan have been used for a range of purposes. Interviewees noted that evaluations generally provided useful information, for accountability or for program management purposes, and recommendations to make needed operational, program-specific improvements. However, evaluations were outcome-based and addressed issues of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. Evaluations were generally not focused, from the perspective of senior management, on strategic issues and challenges facing a program or the department-as-a-whole.

Tracking of implementation of agreed actions has been rigorous (Tracking is a two-step process: self-assessment by management and validation by AEB). Tracking implementation of recommendations was highly valued.

The neutral assessment confirmed the following uses of evaluation at NRCan:

- To comply with the evaluation requirements of TB policies governing evaluation;
- To comply with the FAA [Section 42.1] regarding G&C programs;
- As input to corporate planning and reporting documents;
- As input with other reviews for program and policy changes;
- As input to MCs and TB submissions (reporting the results of past evaluations regarding relevance and performance; and, performance measurement information); and,
- As a component of departmental and government-wide accountability reporting by providing a published record of results achieved by programs.

With the replacement of the Departmental Evaluation Committee (DEC) with PMEEC and the DM's expectation for strategic discussions, evaluations have started to inform discussion of broader strategic issues.

Factors that supported use

The neutral assessment confirmed that the following factors supported the use of evaluations at NRCan:

- PMEEC is working well at NRCan and is chaired by the Deputy Minister;
- PMEEC includes a knowledgeable and experienced external member;
- The external member of PMEEC adds a valuable challenge function. It is a good practice to hold in-camera pre-meeting briefings with the DM and the external member. These

provide an opportunity for private and candid discussion of the issues sheets, evaluation plans, reports and Management Response and Action Plans (MRAPs);

- A transition is underway for strategic analysis and discussion of performance at PMEEC and at other NRCan governance committees. Evaluation plans and reports were reviewed at PMEEC. In addition, strategic issues are highlighted for discussion through use of evaluations and issues sheets. These issues sheets are prepared for discussion along with the evaluation report and MRAP. In addition, during PMEEC discussions, evaluation findings have recently been applied more broadly to strategic program and department-wide challenges and issues;
- There has been rigorous follow up of action plans in MRAPs;
- There has been visible and explicit DM and senior executive commitment to use of evaluation, performance measurement and experimentation to improve policies, programs, and operations;
- NRCan is a science-oriented department with a professional management culture;
- There has been consultative evaluation planning; use of working groups / advisory committees;
- There has been consultation with senior executives and officials in related units (Policy [for MCs], Planning, Performance Measurement, Experimentation, Finance [for TB subs]); and,
- There has been internal ownership by the Head of Evaluation of the final evaluation outputs [close management of external evaluation consultants].

Potential for Additional Uses

Although standards are being met, by using the flexibility of the 2016 Policy, the function is aiming to deliver additional value through evaluations that provide advice to improve programs and inform priorities and decision-making for the future of programs. In addition, PMEEC aims to consider department-wide application of lessons-learned from evaluations.

Expectations of the Function as Expressed by PMEEC

PMEEC has supported the department in responding to the requirements of the 2016 Policy and the *Experimentation Direction for Deputy Heads*. With regard to evaluation, PMEEC has provided advice to the DM about evaluation planning, completed reports, and resourcing. PMEEC has recommended the approval of evaluation reports and summaries; management action plans; and, the implementation of approved management actions.

Over the period 2016 to 2018, the function has been in a period of transition and has begun to use the flexibilities in the 2016 Policy.

To meet DM expectations, as discussed at PMEEC, evaluation is in the process of reviewing evaluations underway to ensure timely completion and to plan for the efficient timely completion of the mandatory and TB-directed evaluations.

In addition, the evaluation function has gained some initial experience regarding the preparation of insightful strategic issue sheets to link evaluation findings to strategic considerations that extend beyond the specific program that was evaluated. Issue sheets are a new tool that has been created for PMEEC, which draw links to strategic and department-wide issues, provide relevant information for discussion at PMEEC, and identify links to other NRCan governance committees.

Interviews and records of decision (RDs) from PMEEC indicate that for the strategic discussions at PMEEC, during recent meetings, evaluation has met the evolving expectations.

Pursuant to interviews, this report presents recommendations to accelerate the transition so that future evaluations are focused and completed in a more-timely manner, and present information to inform decision-making and strategic discussions as envisaged for PMEEC.

Given the limited budget of the evaluation function, as the evaluations underway are completed, evaluation expects to have capacity available to apply new approaches.

Integration of Activities from Evaluation Function into the Governance Process

In past, evaluations focused on the programs evaluated. Results were recommended for approval at DEC/PMEEC and reflected in Departmental Estimates (Departmental Plans, DPs, and Departmental Results Reports, DRRs), MCs and TB submissions. Evaluations served mainly as an accountability tool. Use of evaluations for program design, initiation, or rollout was limited. Integration of activities from evaluation into other governance processes was limited.

Change is underway; during 2018, PMEEC RDs note progress regarding the integration of information from evaluations for discussion at other committees and achieving broader application across NRCan. PMEEC decided to make links to other relevant committees in a systematic and rigorous manner. The strategic issue sheets, prepared to accompany evaluation reports for discussion at PMEEC, have been used to draw links to other relevant committees. PMEEC RDs note required follow-ups and discussions at other NRCan committees.

Interviews confirmed the intention to integrate strategic discussions at PMEEC into NRCan's governance process. Recent meetings have drawn strategic issues from evaluations. Given the presence of senior management at PMEEC, discussions started at PMEEC and recorded in a PMEEC RD can be followed up in other governance committees.

Tools and Techniques Used by the Function

The evaluation function at NRCan, consistent with standard practices in the federal government, has used social science research tools and techniques to conduct neutral, non-experimental design evaluations. NRCan data collection methods have included file/database review, documents review, surveys, key informant interviews, and case studies, which have been conducted in a professional and competent manner.

There has been adequate consultation with senior management and program management for evaluation planning and for the planning, conduct and reporting of individual evaluations.

Evaluations are conducted in-house or with external consultants. When external consultants are used (for all or part of the evaluation), they must comply with the mandatory TB procedures and standards. Consultant work is very carefully monitored by in-house evaluators. NRCan evaluation is responsible for the results.

A draft of a manual setting out standard operating procedures is in preparation.

For more complex evaluations, a working group (advisory committee) is used to provide advice to the evaluators at key milestones during the evaluation. Peer review is used to seek internal advice at key milestones during evaluations. The draft manual states that the external member of PMEEC may also be invited to provide advice.

Evaluation plans, data collection tools, working papers, and reports have been rigorous, well-written, and well-organized.

Since the merger of the function with internal audit, the function has had a higher profile in the department. Collaboration with internal audit and potential synergies have been explored.

To meet expectations to deliver information to inform decision-making and to address strategic issues, the function plans to develop procedures and greater capacity for other types of evaluations, such as implementation or pre-design evaluations, and more-focused, more-timely evaluations.

Mix of Knowledge, Experience, and Disciplines within the Staff, including Staff Focus on Program Improvement

NRCan evaluation officials are highly-professional and have the required competencies to implement the appropriate social science research methods to conduct evaluations that meet TB standards and to implement evaluation plans tailored to identify potential program improvements. NRCan evaluators are well supported with regard to professional development.

To be effective in adopting the flexibilities of the 2016 Policy, evaluators require an excellent understanding of the NRCan business lines and a significant professional network within the department. To focus evaluations at the planning phase, evaluators must be aware of emerging issues for decision-making and strategic issues regarding existing and new programming. Fortunately, the evaluation function collectively, is well positioned to meet this requirement and has some experience using internal peer review processes. In addition, training is a priority for the evaluation function at NRCan.

This is a small group of about 11 FTEs, with a wide range of skills and experience. In house skills are augmented through contracting with firms specialized in conducting evaluations.

With regard to detailed program knowledge, evaluation at NRCan may require that the evaluation team have, or have access to, expert scientific or technical business-line knowledge.

To be effective in conducting evaluations and interpreting data that is collected, NRCan evaluators use an internal peer review process at key milestones to make use of the broad mix of experience and knowledge available from evaluation staff; and, establish (usually internal to NRCan) working groups (advisory groups) for complex evaluations.

Since the 2016 Policy was issued, and given the high priority of “deliverology” concepts and performance measurement, government-wide there is a relatively high-demand (compared with a limited number of experienced staff) and relatively high turnover in the evaluation and performance measurement functions.

There is an openness to creating assignment opportunities in the evaluation unit to attract officers from departmental programs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Using the flexibility of the 2016 Policy

The 2016 Policy provides flexibility for the evaluation function. NRCan has taken the required mandatory steps to comply with the evaluation requirements of the 2016 Policy. NRCan aims to go beyond compliance with the minimum TB requirements to strategic use of evaluation and performance measurement information.

Planning is key to enhance usefulness and timeliness of the function in general, and of specific evaluations. Evaluations can be crafted to inform the issues of greatest interest to senior management.

The right Departmental Evaluation Plan (especially the first two years of the plan), and the right plan for each individual evaluation are vital to meet the expectations of the Deputy, as expressed at PMEEC, for evaluations to inform decision-making and to address strategic issues and priorities.

Enablers

The following enablers are identified as important for the implementation of the opportunities for improvement:

- Visible DM support is key for the evaluation function to achieve its potential as a contributor to inform strategic issues and priorities. DM support facilitates receiving the required attention in a department with challenging workloads;
- Awareness by executives of evaluation products and advisory services. The 2009 Policy requirements and practices were well established at NRCan. It will take a focused communications effort from the evaluation function to improve awareness of the additional room for innovation, resulting from the 2016 Policy;
- Innovative use of PMEEC, and the external member of PMEEC, for strategic discussions of program-specific and department-wide issues;
- Awareness of Head of Evaluation, evaluation managers, and evaluation officers regarding departmental priorities and strategic issues. To focus evaluations as is allowed under the 2016 Policy, evaluation managers and officers must have a strong understanding of the NRCan business lines, priorities and challenges;
- Timely responsiveness from managers to requests from evaluators and provision of feedback regarding draft reports from evaluation. To achieve timely reports, useful for decision-making, evaluations must be done in a timely manner. This requires better focusing of evaluations. It also requires that program managers give priority to information requests from evaluators, to their participation on working groups/advisory committees, and to the review of draft reports;
- Rigorous implementation of Performance Information Profiles (PIPs). Managers are responsible for implementing the approved PIPs. If quality performance information is available to evaluators, this can significantly reduce the time required for evaluations;
- Collaboration with internal audit to take advantage of synergies; and,
- Communication and effective evaluation liaison with “partner” departments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations aim at increasing the value-added of the function to inform strategic discussions and decision-making.

Continue to Take Advantage of the Flexibility in the 2016 Policy

The group has done many outcome-based evaluations focused on addressing issues of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency. The neutral assessment team suggests that it would be beneficial to create some concrete examples of other evaluation types to show the potential benefits from the flexibility in the 2016 Policy.

Recommendation #1:

The 2016 Policy allows evaluations to be focused and to aim to inform strategic discussions and decision-making. The budget available to the function is limited. The neutral assessment team suggests that NRCan target its use of the department's rather modest evaluation resources (about \$1.5 million annually and about 11 FTEs). Use focused approaches to evaluation planning, implementation and reporting. For non-FAA evaluations, be very selective about how many and which issues are examined. Take account of previous evaluations to focus the scope of evaluations. . Consider using a phased-approach to focus the evaluation on the key issues and shorten the time required to bring relevant information to management to inform decisions. Focus on parts of programs, policies and initiatives.

The evaluation function at NRCan has a long experience with outcome-based evaluations. To inform decision-making, we suggest that NRCan should consider conducting implementation evaluations, forward-looking evaluations as well as evaluations that look back in time.

The merger with Internal Audit has significantly increased the profile of the evaluation function at NRCan. There are additional potential benefits from this merger. We suggest that in implementing this recommendation, NRCan continue to coordinate planning and data collection with internal audit. Also, continue to consider joint evaluations and internal audits when issues to be addressed call for both types of review.

To take greater advantage of the flexibility of the 2016 Policy, NRCan should plan advisory assignments, in particular, related to:

- The development and refinement of PIPs;
- The design phase and initial roll-out of new (or modified) programs; and,
- Pilot projects and other experiments.

Recommendation #1: Continue to make use of the flexibility provided in the 2016 Policy on Results.

Management Response: Agree.

The Evaluation Division will continue to make use of the flexibility provided in the 2016 Policy on Results, putting in place actions by April 1st 2019. These actions will include:

- Integrating activities with the Audit Division by coordinating joint planning and data collection, as well as standardizing processes;
- Ensuring evaluations are tailored and focused, as appropriate, (e.g., by issue, region, time period, etc.), based on a needs and risk assessment;

- Expanding the types of evaluations done to include, implementation, forward looking, and backwards looking evaluations or other approaches most appropriate to the objectives of the evaluation; and
- Taking on other projects afforded by the flexibility of the policy such as assisting with program design, and pilot projects and experiments, as needs are identified and resources allow.

Make Evaluations More Timely

Evaluations must be credible and meet the required standards. However, they do not need to take excessive time to plan, implement, and report.

One way to shorten the time required is to focus the number of issues to be examined. Another way to shorten the time required for an evaluation is to focus the scope of evaluations. Evaluations can examine a shorter time period; focus on one or more regions rather than all of Canada; consider a geographic area rather than all of Canada; or, use a smaller sample size than has been used in past evaluations at NRCAN. Wherever possible, evaluations can validate and use the performance information collected through implementation of PIPs. This could be a significant time-saver. Where it is vital that an evaluation be conducted in a shorter timeframe, NRCAN can consider using independent teams to simultaneously collect data.

Sometimes external consultants can require extra time to understand the program or interpret the data, depending on the knowledge of the program and their experience conducting evaluations. At times, there may be significant time saved if NRCAN were to require considerable relevant experience if using external contractors.

Some NRCAN reports are rather long and technical. These may take significant time during the reporting phase of an evaluation. We suggest that there could be significant time saved if the evaluation team were to shorten evaluation reports. Shorter reports may speed the review of drafts by the program and the quality assurance process within the evaluation function. This suggestion is about the time required for reporting. The evaluation team would still have to collect the required data during the data collection phase and interpret the data with rigour.

Achieving timely evaluations requires significant attention by the program managers and officials. We suggest that evaluators consider shortening the expected turnaround time for provision of information and feedback from managers. Evaluators should set an example for high concern for timeliness. We suggest that the Head of Evaluation make evaluation a model for rigorous respect of (short) deadlines. Then expect the same attitude from the senior managers of each program or initiative that is to be evaluated.

Recommendation #2: Significantly reduce the length of time required for evaluations.

Management Response: Agree.

The AEB will introduce a 12-month standard for the completion of new evaluations. However, to meet this standard, we will need to take steps to address the root causes for delays to evaluation projects, to be implemented by April 1st, 2019. These include:

- At the time of project launch, requiring program management agreement to prioritizing requests from evaluation for data/information required to conduct the evaluation, participating in the evaluation (e.g., on working groups), and providing feedback on evaluation products
- Building awareness about evaluation and the need to prioritize requests, through discussions at departmental committees (e.g., PRC, CPN, sector management tables);
- Working with programs to develop and improve performance information, including PIPs.

- Conducting needs and risk assessments at the evaluation planning stage to appropriately focus the scope of each evaluation, select an appropriate approach and design (including data collection methods/sources); and
- Simplifying and shortening evaluation reporting, including through the use of graphics and innovative reporting techniques; and
- Supplementing evaluation teams with additional resources as required through contracting, casual/student opportunities, etc.

Use of the External Member of PMEEC

PMEEC plans to meet quarterly. Adequate time during a PMEEC meeting for advice from the external member directly to the evaluation function may be quite limited. Individual briefings would allow the external member to provide advice that can be used to improve evaluations at the planning and at the reporting stages. For individual evaluations, the Head of Evaluation and the evaluation team could deliver a briefing to the external member and invite the external member's advice on the evaluation plan and when preparing preliminary findings.

The draft manual provides for this only as a possibility, in addition to peer review. Acceptance of this recommendation would make both peer review and consultation with the external member of PMEEC the standard (default) process for doing NRCan evaluations. We suggest that NRCan pilot test this idea for two evaluations before writing the detailed standard operating procedure in the draft manual.

Recommendation #3: Invite the external member of PMEEC to provide advice to the Head of Evaluation and evaluation teams at the planning and reporting phases.

Management Response: Agree.

The evaluation procedure will be modified to require the engagement of the external member of PMEEC at key phases of evaluations (planning/scoping and reporting). This will be completed and implemented by December 31st, 2018.

Ensure Strong Understanding of Program Details by Evaluators

For the evaluation of complex scientific programs, we suggest that the evaluators should contract with at least one recognized external expert science advisor, (and if not located in the National Capital Region, use email and telephone to include that expert) as a member of the evaluation team. Assign her/him responsibility to provide advice to the team at key milestones during the planning, conduct and reporting of the evaluation, before milestone documents are sent for peer review and to the advisory group.

At start of the planning phase of an evaluation of a complex program, (rather than relying on review of documents) hold a briefing of the full evaluation team with the program. Ask senior program management to describe the key risks and challenges facing the program from their perspective.

For complex programs, hold a focus group with the evaluation team and relevant industry experts to invite and understand their views about program challenges and their advice regarding the evaluation plan. If practical, the evaluation team could hold similar focus groups with provincial officials, officials from relevant federal departments or agencies, or other relevant stakeholders.

Based on interviews, in past there have been delays due to incomplete understanding of the program details by evaluators. Investing in these activities at the start of the planning phase is expected to improve the plan, avoid misunderstandings and potential misinterpretation of data received from stakeholders, and to save time during data collection and analysis and reporting.

Recommendation #4: At the start of the planning phase, ensure strong understanding of program details by the evaluation team.

Management Response: Agree.

The AEB will take actions to ensure evaluation teams have the knowledge and skills to understand program detail by implementing practices, such as:

- Updating the project launch process to include meetings with program management or other officials, and, where applicable other industry/sector experts;
- Using subject matter experts and/or technical advisors, where appropriate, as part of evaluation; and
- Including industry/sector experts as data sources in the data collection phase of an evaluation (e.g., through interviews, focus groups, etc.)
- As part of the finalization of the Terms of Reference, requiring the responsible ADM to provide concurrence on the scope and schedule for the evaluation.

Considerations for when and how to engage experts will be developed and implemented by April 1st, 2019.

Appendix A ACRONYMS

2016 Policy	Treasury Board <i>Policy on Results, Directive on the Evaluation Function, and Standard on Evaluation</i>
CIRNA-ISC	Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs - Indigenous Services Canada
DAC	Departmental Audit Committee
DEC	Departmental Evaluation Committee
DEP	Departmental Evaluation Plan
DP	Departmental Plan
DRR	Departmental Results Report
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
FAA	Financial Administration Act
FTEs	Full time equivalents
ISED	Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development
MC	Memorandum to Cabinet
MRAP	Management Response and Action Plan
NRCan	Natural Resources Canada
PCO	Privy Council Office
PMEEC	Performance Measurement, Evaluation and Experimentation Committee
PIP	Performance Information Profile
RD	Record of Decision
TB	Treasury Board
TBS	Treasury Board Secretariat