Evaluation Framework Studies
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Program Evaluation Branch

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Discussion Paper on Evaluation Framework Studies

1.   Introduction and Overview

This paper is divided into two major parts.   Part A introduces the concepts concerning the evaluation framework and its rationale.   Part B describes the procedures involved in a framework study and comments on the interactions among the various parties involved.   This second part will be of interest primarily to practitioners of evaluation and their managers. The first part, however, may interest program planners and managers as an introduction to an exercise that should affect all new and revised programs.   Central agency staff also may find Part A to be of interest since evaluation frameworks relate very naturally to significant central undertakings such as the development of the Policy and Expenditure Management System and the reform of the Estimates.

The paper describes evaluation frameworks as the initial documentation of a new or substantially revised program as well as an examination of what might be done (primarily in the area of data collection) to facilitate future evaluations of the program. However, not only does this process improve the potential cost-effectiveness , scope and quality of future evaluations over what otherwise might result, but it also can contribute to better program design and better operational management.   In other words, the deliberations that go on in a framework study are helpful in all three stages of the management cycle: planning, implementing and reviewing or monitoring.   Furthermore, these contributions can be at all levels - at the level of the program itself, at the departmental level and even at the Cabinet Committee level.

It might seem, then, that a process with so much potential payoff ought to have a high profile and command respectable amounts of resources both within and outside departmental evaluation units.   Indeed, this probably should be the case in some departments.   However, there are several other possible ways in which the tasks of adequate program documentation and preparation for the collection of data on program performance can be carried out.   For example, the development of Operational Planning Frameworks (note that the word "frameworks" is employed here in different context) should produce good documentation of a program's intended results.   Further, the accountability demands of the Policy and ExpenditureM anagement System imply that the achievement of these results should be monitored.   Similar demands are made by the reporting requirements of the revised format of the Estimates.

Apart from these two central requirements, there also may be demands (other than program evaluation) inside the department for good quality planning documentation and performance monitoring. This will depend largely on the sophistication of management systems.   For example, a department may have an elaborate MBO structure or advanced management information systems.   The effort and thought going into such systems may produce much of what a framework study might otherwise recommend.

Thus, for some departments, a thorough evaluation framework study, such as described in Part B of this paper, would cover much the same ground as one or more other initiatives if implemented without modification.   It is, of course, preferable that adequate consideration of program design, management and accountability not be confined solely to the departmental evaluation unit.   Therefore, it is a premise of this discussion paper that evaluation frameworks represent a series of tasks which should accompany the introduction or revision of a program but that these tasks need not all be part of a separate single study managed

by the evaluation unit. Rather, the responsibility of the
evaluation unit lies in being able to assure the Deputy Head that a
useful, timely and adequately conclusive evaluation study can be
carried out in the future. This assurance also will imply that the
rationale and design of the program have been "challenged" in a
constructive way and that both program managers and evaluators are
well supported by appropriate information systems.

Part A - CONCEPTS AND RATIONALE

2.   Defining Evaluation Framework Studies

An evaluation framework study is the process through which a (new) program's purpose, background and description are documented and, if need be, clarified. At the same time, it is determined what information must be collected in order to be able to conduct a useful evaluation of the program at an appropriate time in the future.

Accordingly, there are two phases to a framework study: profile development and investigation of information requirements. Clarification of purpose, background and description is covered in the development or re-working of the program profile. The information requirements phase covers the investigation of possible evaluation issues, appropriate indicators and evaluation designs, associated data sources and methods of analysis that might be used in the eventual evaluation study. The products of the study are the new or updated profile and a set of options outlining the possibilities for, and consequences of, various information collection initiatives and/or program implementation modifications which can improve the evaluation of the program. Suggestions also may be made on the best timing for the program's future evaluation in the department's long term evaluation plan.

However, as noted in the introduction, the requirements of these two phases may be met, entirely or partially, by other planning and systems development initiatives in a department. Therefore, the existence of an evaluation framework study as a project separate from program planning and design may be unnecessary.

Many departmental evaluation policies call specifically
for evaluation frameworks to go through various sign-off and approval
stages involving the manager or director of the program evaluation
unit and the Deputy Head or Senior Departmental Evaluation Committee.
This seems reasonable when the framework study is a separate and
substantial initiative. The size and detail of a report on a
framework study, however, ought to be appropriate to the amount or
original work involved. Thus, if most of the requirements of a
framework study are filled through planning or systems work, then
formalities and documentation can be minimized. Some suggestions
on reporting" will be discussed in a later section. What is important
to remember is that a framework study is not intended to be a
technical exercise carried out internally by the evaluation unit.
It is, in contrast, an important instrument of senior management,
designed not only to improve future evaluations but also to promote
better program design and operation. If planning and operational
control are functioning well in a department, the recommendations
of a framework study are unlikely to be controversial. The value
of its contribution to improved management may be modest. In such
circumstances , the completion of framework requirements will not be
onerous. In a department with less advanced management practices,
significant effort will be required but with greater potential
returns. A superficial framework study would be of little use in
such an environment.

In other words, there is a standard for the conduct of
evaluation framework studies in terms of results - adequate program
documentation, rational program design, sensible performance monitoring
and commitment to evaluation. However, this standard can be achieved
in various ways and with a level of effort appropriate to the
program and departmental circumstances.

Because evaluation framework studies and evaluation assessments have several similarities, there is a possibility of confusion. Appendix I provides a detailed discussion of differences and similarities. In summary, however, both require development or updating of a profile and both explore evaluation designs and make recommendations to senior management on upcoming evaluation studies. One difference is timing. Assessments immediately precede studies. Frameworks deal with studies often years in the future (which of course will be preceded by assessments). Assessments are intended to focus on key issues of immediate client concern. Frameworks provide an opportunity to enhance the evaluation of any or all of a comprehensive set of issues, permitting flexibility in the final selection of issues. Assessments provide options which usually encompass a choice of issues, methods, timing and resources for the actual evaluation. Frameworks provide options too but these concern only what should be invested in data collection between the present and the time of the evaluation study. These data, probably but not necessarily, will be useful in the future study depending on what selection of issues, methods etc. is done in the assessment that will precede the evaluation.

3. Reasons for Evaluation Framework Studies

The two major reasons, from a departmental viewpoint, for conducting a framework study have been alluded to several times already. In the first place, a framework study will produce recommendations which, if acted upon, should contribute to a more useful future evaluation. Improvements could occur in several areas. Data could become available which would allow a wider range of issues to be addressed. Data collection could be faster and cheaper, resulting in a more timely and cost-effective study. And because, for example, comparison groups or pre-program measurements can be developed more readily, more incisive evaluation methods could be applied in the eventual evaluation. A more credible,

reliable study would be the result, with more quantitive, objective measurement and clearer isolation of program effects from other events. The OCG Discussion Paper "Methods for Determining Program Outcomes" covers these aspects in some depth.

The second major motivation for framework studies is the opportunity to scrutinize a new program's mandate, design and rationale in a reasonably formal manner. The discipline of having to document the legal environment, the elements and the structure of the component can reduce the risk of poorly thought-out programs being advanced or implemented. Of special concern will be the intended effects of the program. Many programs have been inspired by a 'need for government action in some area but little thought has been given to what will mark success or constitute failure. Even less attention may have been paid to how anyone will know if the success or failure criteria have been met. A framework study can provide these criteria and can plan to collect information on their satisfaction. If program designers cannot supply enough infor- mation on program goals or intended operations to permit a satis- factory framework study to be completed,thisisaclearindication of inadequate preparation. On the other hand, it would be ideal if this level of documentation of intended results and challenge to program design were an integral part of normal program planning and did not rely on a framework study for stimulus.

The idea of success or failure criteria has potential for good consequences with respect to management and especially program accountability but it is not without drawbacks. Since many programs are implemented on a trial or pilot basis, it may not be possible to predict with much accuracy what might be achieved until a test period is over although expectations should be documented. Success criteria and a framework are most appropriate when full-scale implementation is scheduled. Realistically, there must be flexibility in the application of such criteria. Often programs will evolve or the backgroundcircumstances change, makingthe

original success criteria obsolete. Perhaps some mechanism such as
an annual review of the specifications of the criteria could be
instituted. This also would allow for unforeseen side effects or
secondary implications to have a bearing on the future of a
program.

Beyond the above reasons, there can be several other
important benefits from conducting framework studies. One is
assistance in the operation of the Policy and Expenditure
Management System. The development of a framework for a new or
revised program provides a general plan for its evaluation. . There
can be, in effect, an agreement between the department and central
agencies on when the program will be ready for evaluation. A
commitment can be made that may include timing and certain key
issues . When program approval and funds are granted on the
condition that the department will be able to demonstrate success
or failure at a pre-specified time, the framework study can ensure
that adequate information will be collected or available to permit
the agreed-upon evaluation. Decisions on continued or expanded
funding may be based, therefore, increasingly on evidence of
performance at a time when the department is ready to present it
and when central agencies are committed to listening to the
arguments. Such arrangements are not unlike "sunset" provisions.

A second benefit is for the modification of the
Operational Plan Framework (not to be confused with evaluation
frameworks) of a department with the introduction or revision of a
program of significant size. In particular, results statements must
be formulated. This process is naturally aligned with the
framework analysis which looks at objectives and intended impacts.
Obviously, if OPF renewal is being carried out conscientiously in a
department, then the benefits of program definition and challenge
and of the formulation of success criteria already are available
and the need for frameworks as a formal, independent activity is
lessened. Similar arguments apply to the need to discuss

effectiveness in the Part III of the Estimates. In fact, information systems set up to accumulate effectiveness data for evaluation may be suitable for the required reporting of results in Part III and vice versa. Good evaluations and framework-generated data collection systems are going to be the major sources of program effectiveness information. Many departments have been limited in their Part 111s to reporting operational data on workloads and costs because of a lack of performance and results information. Just as with OPFS, however, if a department is taking steps to see that effectiveness information is available for Part III purposes, an independent framework study· for evaluation purposes could be unnecessary duplication. Integration of these efforts is desirable so that only residual special data collection efforts need be singled out. The framework requirements, however, should emphasize the perspective of future availability of effectiveness information over a period of a number of years. Such information may come from sources external to the department. This emphasis should counteract any tendency to rely too much on short term internal information which rarely can provide much evidence of effectiveness.

Within a department too, there are further benefits in doing framework studies, especially for new programs. For one thing, a commitment to evaluation is made from the outset. There is an awareness of the resources that will need to be devoted to the evaluation. Program staff and management should have an expectation of evaluation that can foster cooperation when the eventual evaluation study is done.

Also, the recommendations of the framework study on data collection or program adjustment for future evaluation purposes may lead to benefits in the area of internal monitoring. A framework report may recommend the continuous or regular collection of certain performance data that happen to be of interest to the line manager,

as well as to the future evaluator.   In fact, this is the ideal
situation in that both parties would support the extra effort for
data collection that otherwise might not be done. Note, too, that
departments with good Management Information Systems are likely to
be collecting essential performance data.   Instead of program
managers benefiting from evaluation framework recommendations, it
is more probable in these departments that future evaluations will
be enhanced by good performance monitoring by line managers.

4.   Occasions for Framework Studies

             Evaluation frameworks are essential only for all new or
substantially revised programs. This represents a trade-off.
Evaluation frameworks have the potential to improve any evaluation
study.   With sufficient time and resources, a department might be
tempted to develop frameworks for all components.   Unfortunately
this could delay doing actual evaluations and hamper the program
evaluation function in demonstrating its full value to resource
allocation, program improvement and accountability.   If frameworks
studies are done chiefly for new programs, this will be less of a
problem.   It seems quite reasonable that new funds should not be
committed without some idea of whether or not information on the
effects of these expenditures will be available before too long.
And, of course, if the documents authorizing a new program specif-
ically call for or promise an evaluation framework as part of the
approval process, it should be scheduled accordingly.   As will be
seen in the section on the "How" of framework studies, the best
time to carry them out for new programs is at the design/approval
stage.   At that time, the program can benefit most both from the
initial "challenge" to its design and rationale and from the
enhancement of future evaluations.   Realistically, framework
studies are unlikely to be allowed to delay urgent programs.
But it is hoped that they can become a routine part of most
program planning and design.

One possible complication to this guideline occurs for very large reorganizations. In this case, it could be a long time before frameworks were complete on all the new or revised components. No hard and fast guidance can be given for this situation. Probably, frameworks are desirable only for initiatives which are truly new in terms of resources or method of operation. Where reorganization is only a wholesale transfer and relabeling without a shift in aims or methods, many likely issues and requirements for evaluation data collection could remain unchanged. For example, the transfer of a program, intact and unchanged, from one department to another would not normally necessitate a framework study. Note too that any future large scale reorganization should result in new Operational Plan Frameworks, new Management Information Systems and revisions to the Estimates Part 111s. These could cover a lot of the aims of framework studies. The departmental evaluation unit would have to advise the Deputy Head in such a scenario on the appropriate balance between conducting current evaluations and planning for future ones .

The development of the Program Evaluation function across the federal government has stressed a rapid demonstration of utility. As noted above, this is why departments have not been encouraged to develop evaluation frameworks for all their programs prior to doing any evaluations. Although frameworks might have resulted in better quality studies for established programs too, the delay might have been deleterious to the evaluation function. This argument seems to apply to the establishment of evaluation in a reorganized area but it is a matter of judgement.

The major occasion for evaluation frameworks should be the introduction or significant revision of a program. However, there are other circumstances where they may be desirable. For example, a provident manager of an existing program may realize that very few data on the program's effectiveness seem likely to be available for evaluation purposes. If the manager feels an

objective confirmation of the program's relevance and worth would
be useful, it is in the manager's interest to ensure an adequate
future evaluation by initiating a framework study of the program.
This scenario may seem improbable to those whose experience is that
program managers would rather avoid evaluation. Consider, however,
the alternative. How comfortable would a manager be with the
evaluation finding that no evidence of effectiveness existed for
his or her program?

     A third possible occasion for framework studies occurs
when, in the course of an assessment or evaluation, it is reaiized
that information which is crucial to many of the important issues
does not exist or will not be available within the time or resource
constraints of the study. Obviously, this ought not to be a
problem where adequate frameworks have been carried out. Good
assessments, too, should prevent such abortive evaluations by
foreseeing possible impasses but they cannot guarantee success.
Sometimes there will be little point in carrying through with the
evaluation due to the lack of timely information, but more often,
the study should continue on those remaining issues where
information is available. Also, it should be emphasized that any
information collected at such a stage should not be discarded. A
report on the findings thus far obtained still can be useful,
although their reliability and completeness must be assessed with
care. Whether or not the original study is completed, something
should be done to prevent the recurrence of an inadequate
evaluation. The assessment or evaluation report may include
recommendations to collect certain information, perform baseline
measurements or even modify the program to enhance future
evaluations. Some studies merely suggest that a framework should
be done. Such recommendations may be a routine result of
assessments and evaluations. Whenever an evaluation covers only
some of the potential evaluation issues that could apply to a
program, and despite any immediate recommendations, little may be
known about the potential quality of future evaluations dealing

with other issues. In this case, it still may be wise to develop a
framework in order to anticipate a wider range of future evaluation
needs and attempt to improve the ability of future studies to
address any of these needs. An exception may be where the
assessment was very comprehensive in its examination of issues and
data sources. This would, indeed, cover the same ground as a
framework study and permit useful recommendations on long-term
information needs.

It should be emphasized that framework studies emerging
from assessments and evaluations ought to be relatively rare occur-
rences . The essential role for a departmental evaluation unit is
to provide information relevant to current decisions. Therefore,
the usual first priority is to carry through studies on what can be
evaluated rather than delaying on the grounds that a framework is
needed to enhance a future evaluation. Something useful almost
always can be done now and a framework study might follow. The
manager of the evaluation function will not want to overcommit
resources to frameworks, which will have payoffs only in several
years, when there are more immediate evaluation requirements at
hand. This will not happen if the evaluation manager can avoid the
conversion of assessments (or evaluations) into framework studies
when addressable issues remain and the assignment of scarce
evaluation resources to framework studies on a routine basis when
this means that other studies must be postponed.

Part B - PROCEDURES AND INTERFACES

5. Participation in Framework Studies

Most departmental program evaluation policies require that the director or manager of evaluation approve program profiles and evaluation frameworks or at least make recommendations on approval to the Deputy Head or Senior Evaluation Committee. When the evaluation staff conducts all or most of the framework study, this works naturally. However, previous sections have discussed the possibility that much of the analysis can be done as part of OPF or MIS development. In these cases, program design staff or consultants may be doing most of the work but the department's program evaluation manager still will want to review their efforts to ensure the fulfillment of framework requirements. In either case, the program profile and evaluation framework development ought to be part of the design or re-design effort for a new or revised program. It is counter-productive to separate the framework study from the other design tasks or treat it as an afterthought. Section 3 above mentioned that the analyses conducted for the profile provide a useful check on the rationale and design of the program. This cannot be accomplished by an isolated program evaluation unit if consulted only at the last minute. The framework is really the general planning for future investigations of program results, relevance and design. It resembles budgeting or planning for staffing or accommodation in that it is as an essential part of program design. It should be integral to the planning process.

Optimally, then, a framework study should be a collaborative effort of the program designers and the departmental evaluation staff. The former are the best and often only source of information about the program's intended activities and goals while the latter will contribute an understanding of what will be necessary in order to collect evidence of program results and on program rationale and alternatives.

There are some other groups that ought to be consulted. For some programs, the program designers will be distinct from the eventual managers or operators. This is especially likely with decentralized departments. Since the program delivery staff may bear most of the burden for any ongoing data collection or other measures, their views on feasibility and costs should be considered seriously. Framework recommendations also may involve a department's finance or management information staff. Even current or potential clients may have significant contributions to make. Some part of the burden of data collection may fall on them. These other interests can be accommodated through membership on the framework study team or through the mechanisms of advisory and steering committees. The use of these separate structures for the framework study would be less appropriate when the framework process is integrated with program development.

Another group with which it may be beneficial to consult is the Department/Agency Relations Branch at Statistics Canada. This office keeps tab on most external data collections by the federal government and may be able to suggest alternatives to special single-purpose surveys. They are also a source of expert advice on survey conduct and analysis.

There is a special role, then, for the director or manager of Program Evaluation in each department. He or she ought to be "plugged-in" to the strategic planning process so that framework studies can be initiated when appropriate. When new programs or revisions are planned, if work is underway while the proposals to Cabinet are being prepared, consultations could extend even to policy committees and TB Secretariat staff. Where other management processes (OPF, Part III, MIS) are well developed, the integration of evaluation, planning and managerial control will be more routine and less leadership will be required from the evaluation unit.
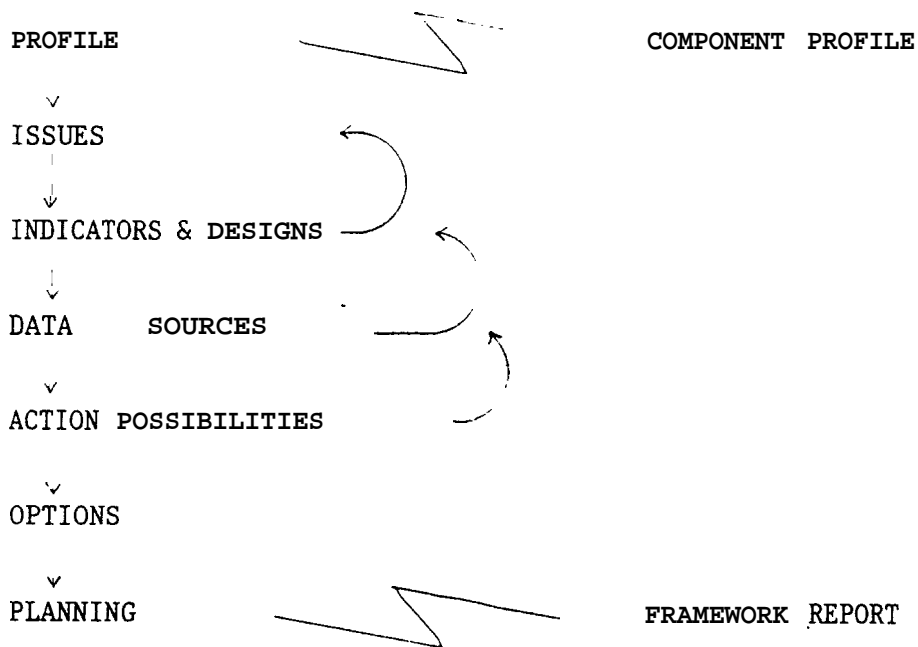
6. The Evaluation Framework Study Process

The introduction or revision of a program may involve more than one component or parts of components. Only a single component will be assumed for this discussion but the principles do not change with the number under consideration.

An evaluation framework study can be divided conceptually into seven steps: profile, issues, indicators and designs, data sources, action possibilities, options and planning. In practice, these steps are not all separate and distinct. Rather they are iterative; that is, considerations during one step may require revisions to the products of earlier steps. Figure 6.1 illustrates the relationships.

FIGURE 6.1

STEPS IN A FRAMEWORK STUDY

PROFILE   COMPONENT PROFILE

  v

ISSUES

  |
  v

INDICATORS & DESIGNS

  |
  v

DATA   SOURCES

  v

ACTION POSSIBILITIES

  v

OPTIONS

  v

PLANNING   FRAMEWORK REPORT

Recall that the aim of a framework study is to provide the Deputy Head with assurances that a new or revised program is well designed and that a useful evaluation of the program can be carried out in the future. Development of a profile is the vehicle for the first assurance since the program's mandate and logical structure are part of the documentation. The investigation of possible issues, evaluation strategies (indicators and designs) and sources of data forms a comprehensive and flexible plan for evaluation of the program. This plan should encompass most of what reasonably can be expected to be specified by a future evaluation assessment study on the program. By anticipating the range of possible assessments, the framework study is able to identify what actions must be taken now or during the program in order to ensure an adequate information base for evaluation. The framework seeks to prevent situations where evaluators cannot address important issues simply because of lack of foresight into what information would be useful for evaluation purposes. This is the key to providing the second assurance of adequate future evaluation. The presentation of recommendations on assuring the availability of evaluative information usually takes the form of options which vary in cost, depth and scope. These require a decision from senior management on the investment that is to be made in improving future evaluations. Once this choice is made, implementation can begin and planning for the eventual assessment and evaluation studies can proceed. The iterative nature of the process, mentioned above, means that when high costs or other practical difficulties in conducting an ideal evaluation are discovered, the issues, designs, data sources or options can be revised or rejected. Each of the steps is described in more detail in the following sections.

6.1 <u>Profiles</u>: Profiles are discussed in some detail in section 4.2.2 of the Treasury Board <u>Guide on the Program Evaluation Function</u> and in section 2.1.1 of the <u>Principles for the Evaluation of Programs</u> so repetition is not required for this paper. Usually, the designers, revisers or program staff can provide the required

information on the component's background and structure, especially if they are on the framework study team. For new programs, documentation may be sketchy but one of the effects of framework studies is the forced examination of basic information about a program. For these reasons, the effort' going into the profile during a framework study may be greater than that associated with the updating of a profile during an assessment study. If the legal basis for the program has not been documented, now is the time to consider it. This is the time, too, to try to document measurable or testable objectives and how they are to be accomplished. The TB Guide, in chapter 7, discusses "preliminary profiles" for new or revised programs. The idea being advanced is that no program' should go forward (except in emergencies) without a certain quantity and quality of information about its background and structure being available.

For a discussion of the value of mounting a logical challenge to new or revised programs, see Konecny and Stoucas, "A Priori Assessment of Proposed New Programs: An Illustration" in Optimum 1981, volume 124 p. 51. Although not written in an evaluation context, it contains some valuable insights. One point the article makes is that new programs rarely have any "track record" (say, of similar programs) to assess but it is still possible to analyze the theory and rationale of the new program. A second point is that challenges are best made before the institutionalization of a program - before clients and staff become dependent on it and before restructuring or cancellation could cause political difficulties. The article recommends a four part analysis, beginning with an examination of the original policy impetus. The second step is a look at the underlying rationale and basic structure. Good documentation of these areas will be helpful in the future evaluation of issues concerning the program's rationale and continued need. The third stage is to assess the program's objectives and fundamental design considerations. Clear

objectives statements are always desirable in evaluation and the plausibility of their achievement with the proposed design ought to be substantiated. The fourth step requires the postulation of the potential major consequences of the program. Some of these may not be among the original objectives (ie. side effects) and special monitoring may be required to detect or measure them.

The article was not implying that framework studies be the sole vehicle through which these analyses would be carried out. They are advisable even if framework studies did not exist. Indeed, proper development of Operational Plan Frameworks includes much of this philosophy. However framework studies can make a contribution. Program design and implementation can be improved during a framework exercise. Through its preliminary review of the rationale and structure of the program, a framework study will encourage the development of measurable results statements and realistic expectations. It will force an examination of the under-lying assumptions and logical links in the program concept. A framework study can serve as a check or challenge to program designers (who otherwise may be caught up in the enthusiasm for a new initiative) by asking how anyone will know if the program actually is making a positive contribution. The program ought to have success criteria.

This last point can be captured through the idea of success criteria. It would seem reasonable that program proponents should be able to answer the questions:

What would have to occur for the program to be judged a success?

Answers to this question should provide useful indicators of program success. Frequently, of course, the answers will be conditional, dependent to some extent on future events unfolding.

Furthermore, different people may have different criteria for success of the program. Thus success criteria, i.e., answers to the above question, should not be interpreted as fixed. Rather they are current expectations for the proposed program which legitimately might be revised in light of actual program experience or changing external environment.

6.2 Issues: Beyond its use in improving program design, the other major use of the component profile is as a tool for developing the potential evaluation issues. In both assessments and frameworks, the usual technique is to consider the program with respect to its rationale, objectives achievement, impacts/effects and alternatives to generate a first list of potential evaluation questions. This list is expanded and improved through discussion with program management, advisory and steering committees (if any) and, if possible, with the Deputy Head. The previously prepared profile can be used to familiarize with the program those who may be unsure about its operation, limits and aims.

The difference, at this stage, between frameworks and assessments is in the timing and possibly the number of issues. In an assessment, only the highest priority and most current issues eventually are selected for inclusion in the evaluation study, although initial consideration should be given to a comprehensive range of possibilities. In a framework, a more comprehensive and flexible list of issues may be maintained and any of these issues may be part of the evaluation that is still a considerable time away. Obviously, the number of issues will vary from program to program but, as a rough guide, an assessment might produce options which could have a dozen or fewer issues each. Many of these issues might be common to more than one option. A framework study, in contrast, might have as many as two or three dozen different possible evaluation issues. During the issue phase of a framework study, only the mildest screening would be done of the suggestions of those consulted, since it is by no means certain what will be

most important at evaluation time. One consideration would be to identify true evaluation issues as opposed to operational concerns. Evaluation issues focus on evidence that a program is necessary, effective and reasonably-priced. A comprehensive set of potential issues would cover all areas.

In some of the first framework studies attempted by federal departments, a seemingly different model of analysis was used. The results, where the studies were done well, were very similar to the expectations for the model outlined so far in section B. The difference was iri the scope of potential issues carried by the framework. By focussing on the evaluation information needs of only a few "key" issues, these studies could be more streamlined and were sometimes easier to discuss with senior management. Senior management was asked to select the evaluation issues several years in advance. The framework study staff then could work on specific recommendations tied to specific issues. The drawback is that the issue predictions could be wrong and the diligent development of certain limited information sources would be insufficient for the real issues identified later or for additional ones.

By considering, in all phases of a framework study, a reasonably large set of potential issues, it is less likely that there would be a mismatch between the information supply and demand at the time of the evaluation. However, it may be that the same data collection initiatives can serve many issues.

It also may be that certain obvious issues will dominate the review of the program or that only a few issues of whatever priority will require long term approaches to their investigation. Thus the comprehensive and focussed approaches could end up with very similar recommendations on the importance of certain preparations for future evaluations. This paper has recommended a comprehensive approach since there is a wider scope for payoff despite the cost of extra framework analysis and possible expanded

data collection. The proper balance between focus and comprehensiveness will have to be struck in each department and perhaps for each program depending on the character of the potential issues and the complexities of the information environment of the program.

6.3 <u>Indicators and Designs</u>: Having developed a set of issues , the next major task is to consider what evaluation research <u>strategies </u>might be employed to address these issues. The OCG Discussion Paper "Methods for Determining Program Outcomes" or any text on social science research can provide advice on strategy development. It is'both a creative and a technical exercise.

The first step in strategy development is to identify <u>indicators </u>for each issue. Indicators are the basic measurements which will provide evidence on the issue in question. But they are meaningful only in the context of a research <u>design</u>. This can be illustrated best by example. Consider an evaluation issue such as "Has an industrial development grant program created employment?" The obvious indicators are employment statistics of the firms involved. However, these statistics will be meaningful or count as evidence only if collected according to a design. In this example, the design could be a comparison with employment at similar firms not participating in the program. Another design could require a measurement before and after the grants. More sophisticated designs also are possible. Particularly with the "outcome" type of issue, it is usually important to incorporate some sort of comparison in the design in order to be able to make casual inferences about the program and its outcomes.

Both indicator and design may be quite straightforward in a strategy to investigate an issue such as "Are clients happy with respect to some (specified) aspect of the program?" Here the indicator could be client opinion and the design might be some expected performance such as eighty percent positive response. An

example where indicators are not so obvious is an issue such as "Is there a continuing need for a certain training program?" Indicators in this case might range from employees' and supervisors' opinions to declines in employee performance or client satisfaction to results of special tests.

It is important to emphasize both inventiveness and rigour in the development of possible strategies during a framework study . Because the eventual evaluation study is usually several years away, there is time to accommodate creative and scientific strategies that will do a better job of providing evidence on the issues . 'In an evaluation assessment, time or resource constraints can limit the quality of the approaches proposed for the impending Study . In a framework study, these constraints are at least negotiable. Recommendations for acceleration or delay and for increased investment of resources, now or during the study, can be entertained.

Ideally, there should be several indicators imagined for each issue. This will permit flexibility of approach when issues are selected following the assessment study. Also, multiple lines of evidence are desirable since real world evaluations rarely approach the standard of controlled, scientific experiments. Thus, single lines of evidence rarely can be conclusive. Multiple indicators can confirm or question each other. If it does not seem even theoretically possible to develop any indicator on a certain issue, then it may be dropped from the list as impossible to investigate. This potential lack of evidence on program theory or effectiveness, however, probably indicates serious "program weakness.

6.4 Data Sources: In the next phase, the list of issues and associated indicators is examined to identify practical sources for the data each requires. The depth to which data sources are considered should be sufficient that it can, with some assurance,

be stated in the' framework report that the required information
will be available. For example, if expert opinion were identified
as a potential data source for an indicator, one might go so far as
to draw up a tentative list of experts and consider the practical
details of consulting them. Could a mail or phone survey provide
the needed reactions or will the experts need to be gathered in one
place for briefings and discussions? In other situations, it may
be necessary to consider whether the program files will contain the
needed information or if a follow-up interview with clients will be
needed. If definite sources cannot be identified or if practical
methods for data collection cannot be imagined, the research
strategy and perhaps the issue must be abandoned. Specification of
evaluation methods must be precise enough to permit the
anticipation and avoidance of practical timing and collection
difficulties.

In practice, the identification of indicators and data
sources need not be completely separate exercises. However, since
a framework study provides an opportunity to plan for a high
quality evaluation in the future, the study team should be wary of
letting practical data sourcing considerations influence too
strongly the suggestion of indicators.

For example, two designs might be suggested for the
analysis of some issue with respect to a particular program. One
indicator could be "percentage of clients satisfied". Its data
source could be a survey of a sample of clients. A second
indicator could be the "the difference in attitude or condition
between clients and a comparison group of non-clients". This could
be a better indicator since it might permit some conclusions about
causality or the attribution of effects to the program. However it
involves twice as much measurement. If the idea for the second

indicator arose during an assessment study, it might be discarded as infeasible since, at that time, there could be no practical way to develop a comparison group of non-clients. This second indicator probably would not even get into any of the options proposed for the evaluation because of its impracticality. In contrast, if this second indicator were suggested during a framework study, it probably would not be discarded. Rather it would be realized that it might be possible, over the considerable period before the evaluation, to define and monitor the proposed comparison group of non-clients. As will be discussed in the following sections, the proposal and decision on whether to invest in the collection of such data form the heart of the framework. What is practical to consider during a framework may be impractical to consider if left until the assessment. In a framework the recommended practice is to keep the choice of issues, indicators and data sources as open as possible so that possibilities for useful investigations in the eventual evaluation are less restricted.

6.5 Action Possibilities: Up to this step, the framework study has produced a list of potential issues and has identified indicators and data sources for these issues. Little selection or priorizing need have taken place. The next step is to identify those areas which require some action now to make future evaluation cheaper or of higher quality, or to permit certain indicators to be used in the eventual evaluation.

There are three major types of action possibilities: baseline measurements, ongoing measurements and minor program implementation modifications. Examples should make each clear. Baseline measurements are needed for reliable before-and-after comparisons. For example, if a government program is intended to change attitudes to hiring handicapped people, an initial measurement of general public sentiments before the program could be compared to attitudes after implementation. It would be far less

satisfactory to ask people if their attitudes had changed only after the period under study. Unless a baseline measurement is taken or determined to be available later, the less satisfactory strategy is all that will be possible at the time of the evaluation.

Ongoing measurements, from an evaluation perspective, are required for programs where data cannot be collected conveniently at the time of program evaluation. Examples might include programs with transitory or short term clients such as counseling services for small businesses or unemployed people. A much more represent- ative measurement of the program's impact would be made if cases were examined throughout the period of operation. At evaluation time, only the current clients will be readily measurable. Even if good client records are kept, it can be expensive to track down an adequate sample and biases can be introduced. It is easier to contact successful businesses than failed ones! Collecting evaluative information from a selection of clients all during the program can be quicker and cheaper and permit deeper analysis. Ongoing measurements also can be useful in effectiveness monitoring for line managers and others. It is hoped that most frameworks suggestions would just be reinforcing what good program managers normally would collect through their management information systems.

Minor program implementation or operation changes are designed not to collect evaluative information but to make its collection easier. For example, a government grant for industrial development or energy conservation measures will have certain eligibility criteria. A natural comparison group for such a program is the set of firms or applicants that were rejected. In many programs, records on rejected applicants would not be kept and no easy means of identifying the comparison groups would exist. Keeping such records is an almost trivial modification to the program operation which makes evaluation better and easier.

Another example of a program modification would be a phased implementation where perhaps one region got the program before another. This would provide a natural comparison group for evaluation purposes.

6.6 Options: The preceding analyses should be distilled down to a list of data collection actions which, if implemented now, will enhance the future evaluation of the program. These should be examined for their merit in terms of cost, ethical considerations and potential benefits just as evaluation strategies would be considered during an assessment. The framework study report (to be described later in more detail) will contain a request for an executive decision on which, if any, of these actions will be implemented. In order to present a manageable number of decision choices, the data collection actions should be grouped into options. Each option would note what issues could and could not be addressed, what extra costs would be incurred now compared to possible savings at evaluation time and what improvements in credibility or objectivity could be expected if that particular group of data collection actions were implemented. Any side benefits to ongoing program management should be mentioned. It also has proved important to suggest which parts of the organiza-tion will bear the cost. One of the options should be the team's judgement of the minimum effort needed to ensure an adequate future evaluation which would be reasonably comprehensive. Other options will represent enhancements of the ꓳinimum and could be based on various themes such as concentration on a particular group of issues , action by certain parts of the organization, type of action (baseline, continuing etc.), level of effort and expense, or degree of credibility of the results.

In the section on development of issues (6.2), a more focussed version of a framework study was mentioned. Although in practice the contrast is not likely to be extreme, the idea of concentrating on the highest priority issues, rather than a fully

comprehensive set, was introduced. This concept could be applied
in the development of options, too. Instead of presenting a
minimum comprehensive option with possible enhancements as the
range of options, the framework study report could suggest a choice
among issue-oriented options. In a simple example, the choice
might be between a future evaluation focussing on rationale and
alternatives, and one concentrating on impacts and effects. Each
option would entail various data collection actions and costs.
Such a choice might result in preparations for a less-than-
comprehensive evaluation but that may be what is required by the
Deputy Head.

An argument for the more focussed model is that it may be
more meaningful for the Deputy Head to identify the key issues that
most likely will be important for the evaluation rather than for
him or her to decide on various indicators and data sources. In
practice, however, these models converge since every serious option
presented should contain a credible approach to evaluating at least
what are expected to be the key issues. Enhanced options probably
will discuss combinations of additional issues and additional data
collection actions. The Deputy Head should know, when the decision
is made on framework recommendations, what issues can be addressed
satisfactorily and which may not.

6.7 Planning: Another important aspect which has not been
dealt with so far is the effect on evaluation planning. Based on
the framework study, and depending on which action option is
chosen, it should be possible to estimate the costs and duration of
the upcoming assessment and evaluation studies, permitting updates
of budgets and schedules. It may be argued that there still are
too many unknowns (such as which particular issues will be
examined) to develop reliable cost estimates. However, the
estimates of costs for the evaluation of other programs which have
not undergone frameworks ought already to be in departmental
evaluation plans and these would have been derived from much less
information.

In addition, the framework analyses should tell how long the program should operate before the various issues can be addressed satisfactorily. Certain evaluative information may not be available for some time even if framework recommendations are implemented. This will signal the earliest date at which the program can be plugged into the long-term cyclical plan in order to be assured of a good evaluation. Recommendations on the extra resources required, or the postponing of other work, should be included if necessary.

7. Budgeting for Framework Studies

Apart from the costs of the framework study itself, there also may be costs associated with recommendations from the study. How are these expenses to be defrayed? Departments have resolved this problem in several ways. There appears to be no reason to recommend any particular course. However, resolution of the resourcing question has been a stumbling block in some framework studies. Therefore, some approach should be thought out for each study at the outset or a standard departmental mechanism decided upon.

Because most framework studies cannot be scheduled in long term plans, there is no easy way to develop a long-term budget for them. They arise from the essentially unpredictable introduction or revision of programs. One option is for the departmental evaluation budget to have a special reserve intended to cover any framework activity during the coming year. Another approach is to consider framework studies as an integral part of the start-up costs of new programs or as contributing to the conversion costs of revised ones. Funding would come from the new or revised program. This is in keeping with the idea that framework analysis would become part of the program design and

approval process. Incidentally, the introduction of significant new programs might require expansion of the departmental evaluation unit's resources in the same way that personnel or financial support units might have to be increased.

For those framework studies initiated by a program manager, it is reasonable that they be paid for from program funds except where the framework will result in significant cost savings for the future evaluation. In that case, the evaluation unit, depending on how it is funded, might consider a contribution as an investment in cheaper future evaluations. The few framework studies which arise from assessments or unsatisfactory evaluations probably will require a reshuffling of the long-term evaluation schedule. Money might be found at that time. For example, if an assessment study reveals that only a few issues may be investigated at present, and that the rest require the long-term approach of a framework, the savings on the limited evaluation that follows could pay for the framework study.

The end-product of a framework study, besides the profile, is a set of options for data collection or for minor program modifications which will enhance future evaluations. These should be accompanied by financing suggestions. Basically, there may be three types of recommendations. One is for a one-time collection of baseline data that can be used for before and after comparisons. This may be handled as for the studies themselves. A reserve in the evaluation budget could be set aside to cover these measurements. In effect, these might be considered as preliminary expenses for later evaluations. Otherwise, the baseline measurement could be included as part, of the start-up or change-over costs of the new or revised program.

The second type of data collection recommendation, and perhaps the most significant, involves continuing or periodic measurement as part of the program delivery. If this data

collection is beneficial to program managers as well as evaluators, the costs may be absorbed by the program. Where the information is of little immediate use to line managers, its collection may have to be subsidized as a long-range "investment" by the evaluation branch or may have to be imposed by high level decision. This last is not so satisfactory to all parties but is not extraordinary. It could be regarded as part of the program's "accountability" obligations. These considerations might also be integrated with the program's responsibilities to monitor effectiveness for reporting to central agencies and Parliament through such vehicles as the Multi-year Operational Plans and Part III of the Estimates.

The third type of recommendation is for minor program modifications. This may range from minor record-keeping actions to phased introduction of the program in order to provide internal comparisons. Where these are internally useful or neither onerous nor costly, line management could absorb costs without problems. Otherwise, as above, subsidies from the evaluation unit or senior management intervention might be required.

8. Reporting Evaluation Frameworks

Although it has been suggested that many of the analyses comprising a framework can be integrated with other design and systems initiatives, a separate framework report seems advisable as the best way to ensure that adequate frameworks are developed. However, where recommendations are not controversial, the report to the Deputy Head, with its assurances of reasonable program design and useful future evaluations, could take the form of a memorandum provided adequate documentation is retained by the evaluation unit.

The report of a framework study has three major purposes. First, it reports on the potential quality of future evaluations. This is of interest to both senior management and central agencies who may be reluctant to approve a program without a promise that

evidence on its success or failure will be available within a
reasonable time.   Or concerned program managers may want to know if
and how their program may be evaluated.   Or the Deputy Head or
Senior Evaluation Committee may have seen a less-than-successful
first attempt at assessment or evaluation and may want to avoid a
repetition.   The framework report meets all these needs for
assurance by demonstrating which important potential issues can be
addressed with what degree of credibility and rigour in the
upcoming or next evaluation.

Second, it seeks decision and action on recommendations
that will enable or enhance the evaluation of some potential
issues.   The consequences of accepting or rejecting this advice are
outlined.   Typically, some immediate and possibly continuing action
may be required and the framework report is the trigger for
decision and implementation.

Third, it is the vehicle for planning how to incorporate
the program's evaluation into the departmental long range
evaluation plan and for assigning resources, both to current
actions and future studies.

Framework study reports should be addressed to the Deputy
Head but, from the above discussion, clearly should be written for
the other potential audiences as well.   The accompanying table
gives a suggested outline for a relatively complete report where
full documentation is desirable instead of a less formal memorandum
format.

A Suggested Outline for Evaluation
Framework Study Reports

1. A Summary which includes:
   the reasons for the study;
   a succinct statement of what would constitute success or
   failure of the program;
   a list of potential evaluation issues;
   the data collection options to improve the adequacy of
   future evaluations (including recommendation);
   an opinion on the likely conclusiveness of the potential
   evaluation; and
   recommended amendments to the departmental program
   evaluation plan.

2. An Introduction which indicates:
   the reasons for the study;
   who carried out the work;
   who was consulted; and
   what constraints the study operated under.

3. A Program Component Profile (or profiles if more than one
   component is involved) which describes:
   the background of the component; and
   the component's structure, usually in the form of a logic
   chart.

4. A Summary of the Analyses including:
   a comprehensive and flexible set of potential evaluation
   issues ;
   indicators which can provide evidence on the issues;
   potential sources of data for the indicators;
   an examination of the related merits and costs of issues,
   indicators and data sources; and
   the identification of possibilities for data collection
   (baseline or on-going measurement) or program modification
   which would improve future evaluations.

5. A Presentation of Options to indicate:
   what improvements could be made to future evaluations if
   each option were implemented;
   what costs and side-benefits are associated with each
   option and who would bear them.

6. A Section on Planning to include.
   estimates of the timing and resources necessary for the
   eventual evaluation of the component(s), possibly dependent
   on choices in section 5;
   proposals for the incorporation of the future evaluation
   into the long-range departmental evaluation plan.

9. <u>Conclusion</u>

The process and model for framework studies presented in the preceding discussion are still developmental. They are subject to several influences, not the least of which will be the practical experience of departmental evaluation units. Other influences will be interactions with the program approval process in PEMS and with effectiveness monitoring for Part III of the Estimates. This paper has presented a quite comprehensive version of a framework study, aimed mostly at the improvement of the quality of future evaluations and of the design of new programs. To the extent that other management processes can assure these aims, less effort need be expended on framework studies, although it is recommended that the steps outlined be followed and documented adequately because it is the departmental manager of program evaluation's responsibility to be able to ensure that the Deputy Head knows what can be evaluated about a program and how well.

It is not intended that framework studies be onerous or lengthy projects. They should not delay the implementation of already approved programs but it is hoped that planning for the evaluation of a new program will be integrated into the rest of the program design process. This will ensure that the benefits of framework studies are more readily realized. Better programs, better accountability and better management can be the results as well as better evaluations.

Appendix I: Comparing Evaluation Frameworks
             and Evaluation Assessments

In several ways, framework studies resemble assessments and the two are sometimes confused because both involve exploring possible issues and methods for an anticipated evaluation. Both also require the development or updating of a program profile. One key difference is timing: an assessment immediately precedes most evaluations - a framework takes place possibly years before the anticipated evaluation. It does not replace the assessment stage but may make the assessment and subsequent evaluation study easier or quicker. Most frameworks studies concern new or significantly revised programs, while assessments typically deal with established programs. Another difference is in the treatment of possible issues. While initially considering a wide range of possible . issues, an assessment ultimately seeks to identify a manageable number of top priority questions which are relevant to the immediate needs of decision-makers. A framework study, on the other hand, explores a comprehensive and flexible list of questions so that a reasonable range of possible studies can be accommodated in the future.

An assessment study may be limited, by the time and resources anticipated to be available for the evaluation, to recommending only a few evaluation strategies involving a limited number of data collection methods (e.g. client survey, sampling of files) that must provide evidence, as best they can, on the particular issues upon which attention will be focused. In a framework study, because no particular issues are chosen at the outset, nor have any deadlines or resource limits been imposed, there is an initial freedom to consider how best to investigate each specific question. It is desirable that several indicators be envisaged for every issue, again allowing flexibility for the ultimate selection of issues and approach. This selection will take place only following an assessment study that follows in several years. The options and

recommendations still have to be practical, of course, but the long lead time does permit more scope for better evaluation planning. The point is that the range of issues and strategies should be less constrained in a framework than in an assessment. Data that are unavailable in the context of an assessment and ensuing evaluation study can be imagined to be available in the longer term planning horizon of the framework. Evaluators can consider more rigorous designs that aim for clearer attribution and isolation of program effects. It should be recognized, however, that framework studies themselves will be conducted under their own time deadlines or resource constraints.

There is a further distinction. The most important product of an assessment is the description of options that guide the selection of issues and approach. A framework study stops short of this focusing of interest on a limited number of issues and approaches. It describes, instead, those actions which, if taken now, will permit more issues to be addressed, will improve the" quality of measurements or will reduce costs in the future evaluation. These actions typically are concerned with data collection or minor program implementation changes and may involve anywhere from minor to substantial amounts of resouces. For convenience, the possibilities for action are grouped into options. Thus, the management decision that is sought through a framework * study is what resources and effort should be expended now toward the improvement of possible future evaluations along with possible side benefits for ongoing management information systems. In contrast, the decision sought by an assessment is what issues and approach will be part of the imminent evaluation study.

As noted above, the evaluation framework study will include the production of the component profile(s) for the new or revised programs as well as the framework analysis. In an assessment, it is usual merely to update a previously existing component profile. Profiles are normally part of the departmental evaluation

plan.   Development of a new profile for a new program in a
framework study is considerably more work. The payoffs in better
program design and monitoring are potentially greater too.

Appendix II: A Study of Departmental Evaluation Policies with
                 respect to Frameworks

Thirty-five departmental evaluation policies were
reviewed to extract information on evaluation frameworks.   The
objective of the review was to identify the provisions departments
make for conducting evaluation frameworks.

Thirty-two out of 35 policies refer to evaluation
frameworks in some manner.   Nineteen policies include a specific
section on frameworks which describes when frameworks are to be
done, what they are to include, and who is responsible for
conducting and approving them.   These procedures for preparing and
approving frameworks are usually repeated under a separate section
on roles and responsibilities. .

While 13 policies do not have a specific section on
frameworks, they do contain certain information on the process and
procedures for conducting them. For example, some policies provide
a brief definition of a framework along with the definitions other
types of evaluation initiatives in one section, and they elaborate
on accountability and approval in another section.   In a few
policies, frameworks are mentioned only in the roles and
responsibilities section while in other policies, information is
included in an appendix as well as in the main text.

Not only do departments arrange their information on
frameworks in different places throughout their policies, there is
also some variation in the type of information they provide.   While
more than 90 percent of the 32 policies state that evaluation
frameworks are to be done when a new program is being introduced or
when significant revisions are being made to an existing program,
only 21 policies contain a full description of what a framework
should include - a complete profile of the program, the
identification of potential evaluation issues, indicators, designs,

data requirements and methodologies, and a tentative timetable for evaluation. Two policies give very general descriptions and the remaining ones do not mention what a framework should include.

Seven departmental policies identify a purpose for conducting framework studies; the purpose usually being to facilitate and improve the future evaluation of a new or revised program. Six of the 35 policies recognize that there is a purpose for conducting frameworks beyond enhancing the quality of future evaluations. These policies state that a framework also should be viewed as "an important management tool in monitoring ongoing program performance".

Almost half of the departmental policies indicate that the most appropriate time to develop an evaluation framework is during the design stage of the program. The other policies lack any type of information pertaining to an appropriate time for development.

Many departments recognize the development of frameworks as a joint or cooperative activity between program management and the departmental evaluation staff. Seventeen policies state that line or program management is responsible for referring new or revised programs to the program evaluation unit while 15 policies do not address this issue. Ten policies recognize that there is "joint responsibility" between program management and the program evaluation staff for the development of framework studies while 12 policies state that the program evaluation unit is responsible for preparing frameworks with the assistance of program management. In four departments, the responsibility for development seems to rest with the program evaluation unit, with no mention of program management involvement or responsibility. In two departments, line management is responsible for developing frameworks albeit subject to approval by the Director of Program Evaluation. Four policies do not indicate who is responsible for preparing frameworks.

The majority of departmental evaluation policies (28)
require that the Deputy Head approve all evaluation framework
studies after the Director of Program Evaluation has reviewed and
approved them.   In one instance, an Associate Deputy Minister is
given the responsibility for final approval.   In three policies, it
is not clear who actually approves frameworks even though it is
obvious that the Deputy Head is responsible for the review and
approval of all evaluation assessments and studies.

It is apparent that there is some variation in both the
format and content of departmental policies with respect to
frameworks.   Some departments prefer to include a specific section
on frameworks while other departments tend to place information on
frameworks in a number of places in their policies.   For
readability purposes, it may be preferable for policies to contain
a separate section on evaluation frameworks as many of them do for
evaluation assessments and studies.   Furthermore, certain policies
incorporate more information on frameworks than others.   It might
also be desirable if a greater number of departmental policies can
be more explicit about the purpose, process and procedures for
conducting evaluation frameworks.