



Increasing Commitment through Evaluation Training for Senior Policymakers

Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME)
South Africa

Why it was introduced

- The Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation ([DPME](#)) in South Africa offers [four training courses](#) to other national departments as they engage in evaluations included in the annual National Evaluation Plan. The courses cover evaluation management, design, methodology, and implementation. In total, over 1,200 government staff had been trained by DPME as of April 2016.
- However, DPME recognized that in addition to building evaluation skills among junior- and mid-level departmental staff, it needed to engage senior leaders and decision makers. That led the department to offer a course on evidence-informed policymaking for senior managers at the Director General, Deputy Director General, and Chief Director levels. The course is meant to increase their commitment to using evidence, and their interest in engaging with DPME to produce and use M&E and research evidence to inform decisions in their departments.
- The Head of Evaluation and Research at DPME took the lead in creating the course, liaising with the Graduate School in Public Policy at the University of Cape Town, where the new head had just left the Presidency and so knew the policy process very well. Approval was sought from the Director General¹ in the Presidency, and funding sought from the Program to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD), a partnership between the Presidency (and later DPME) and the European Union that supports evidence-informed policymaking in South Africa.

Incentivizing Evidence-Informed Decision Making in Government

How are public sector officials incentivized to use evidence² routinely in their work, whether to inform major policies and decisions, design or alter programs, or guide implementation? The [Results for All Incentivizing Evidence-Informed Decision Making in Government](#) series highlights strategies, processes, and programs that government agencies around the world have used to create incentives for using evidence in government decision making.

¹ The Director General is the top public servant in each department, who reports to the Minister.

² We define evidence broadly as the best information available to decision makers, which can include administrative and statistical data, research, evaluations, and citizen input.

How it works

- The 2.5 to 3-day course covers the difference between evidence and opinion, the evidence cycle (diagnosis, planning, implementing, and achieving), and how evidence can be used at different phases of the cycle. Types of evidence explored include data, research, and evaluation. Finally, participants apply the learning to their own departments and outline what they should when they return.
- The core facilitators are a former Director General, the head of the Graduate School in Public Policy from the University of Cape Town, a Deputy Director General and Director from DPME, and a set of experts who provide TED talk-type inputs.
- To select participants, the Director General in the Presidency sends letters to all departments and provinces inviting them to attend. Teams are encouraged to apply so that, ideally, 4-5 officials attend from one department. Priority is given to applicants the top 3 ranks of the public service, with some officials from the 4th rank if part of a team.

What it has achieved

- DPME has trained over 300 senior managers since the pilot course in 2013. The course has been instrumental in generating buy-in among senior leaders, and turning them into supporters and champions of greater evidence use. Participants have also gone on to request DPME-led evaluations of programs in their respective national departments, leading, for example, to the approval of evaluations in the Treasury and the Departments of Home Affairs and Justice for 2016-2017.
- “12 out of 46 national Directors-General have attended, and some are becoming evidence champions. As a direct result we have approved for 2016/2017 evaluations proposed by the Treasury and the National Departments of Justice and Home Affairs.” – Ian Goldman, Former Head of Evaluation and Research at DPME
- DPME has also offered training to members of parliament, demonstrating how evaluation and other forms of evidence can assist parliamentarians with their legislative work and oversight responsibilities. To reinforce these lessons for the parliamentary committee it reports to, DPME organized study tours to the US, Canada, Kenya, and Uganda, allowing members of parliament to see how other countries utilize evidence, and to benchmark the work of DPME.

What lessons were learned

- Political support is essential. Senior managers need to be able to see how they can respond to political priorities by using evidence to suggest policies and programs that address them most effectively. This will help them buy into the need for evidence so that they can facilitate and champion its use even further.
- Level of commitment varies. It makes sense to start collaborating with the stronger departments, where efforts to encourage evidence use will more likely be successful, and use those successes to encourage and engage others.
- Another key lesson from the course is that the diagnosis phase is often missed, with a political agenda moving straight to policy or program design, instead of adequately defining the problem, analyzing the root causes, considering options, and developing a theory of change for the preferred intervention. Where this does not happen, there is a high risk of addressing symptoms

rather than causes, and creating programs which subsequent evaluations show are not effective or efficient.

What comes next

- More work with parliament is needed. DPME is working with parliamentary committees and their research staff to ensure that they are aware of M&E findings and follow up on the resulting plans to improve programs. However, rapid turnover among members of parliament can impede effective oversight, and requires that DPME continuously train new members. This means that it is important to focus on parliamentary researchers and budget offices, where there is less turnover.
- Work is underway to explore how best to link learnings from evaluations with budgets, to change funding allocations depending on the effectiveness of programs. Some experiments have been tried on presenting evaluation findings and implications for the budget, but much more work is needed.
- Institutionalizing evidence use happens slowly. Since its inception, DPME has completed around forty national evaluations, and seen more departments using the findings to make changes in policy and practice. However, government culture still needs to place greater value on learning so that departments and parliamentary committees commission, produce, and use evidence to inform their work on a routine basis.

Resources

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- Interview with Ian Goldman, Former Head of Evaluation and Research, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, South Africa, December 19, 2017.
- National Evaluation Plan 2016/17 to 2018/19. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, April 26, 2016.
- Paine Cronin, Gemma & Mastroera Sadan, 2015, "Use of Evidence in Policy Making in South Africa: An Exploratory Study of Attitudes of Senior Government Officials." *African Evaluation Journal* 3(1), Art. #145. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v3i1.145>
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