Objective: Process evaluations aim to evaluate whether a program's operational mechanisms support the achievement of the objectives of the program.

Context: This evaluation is usually completed on a case by case basis, requested directly by program managers and other stakeholders at the line ministry level. It is also common for international agencies to include process evaluations as part of their work plan. Mexico has recently institutionalized process evaluations in their national menu of evaluations by developing a standardized process evaluation methodology. This is the first case of a country committing to wider scale homogenization and implementation of process evaluations in government, and opens up new possibilities of process evaluations contributing to results oriented government, through for example Meta analysis of public administration processes.

Figure 1: Different Uses of Process Evaluations

Uses	Description
Testing program theories/designs at the beginning of the program cycle.	Process evaluations can be used during the planning stage of a program cycle to test if a program theory translates to reality when implemented on the ground. As such process evaluations can be very valuable in the context of piloting initiatives.
Improving individual program processes.	A process evaluation is most often completed mid term during program implementation as part of a longer term monitoring process. This allows program managers to make adjustments to a program's operational processes in a timely manner if it is perceived that these will not reach established goals.
Illuminating the 'black box' of impact evaluations.	Process evaluations can be part of evaluation tools used in 'mixed methods' evaluations. They can illuminate impact evaluation findings by providing information related to the performance of program's operational mechanisms.
Identification of best practices.	When process evaluations are conducted for the same program design operating in a different contexts, such as different regions or municipalities, best practices can be drawn out by comparing findings and transferred to other projects.
Analysis of public administration processes:	If process evaluations are collected in a systematic manner across the public administration over time then this information can be used to complete a meta analysis of government processes, identifying common bottlenecks and areas for improvement. Results of this exercise might be regulatory reform initiatives.

Design: Process evaluations are characterized by the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The large variety of process evaluation designs makes it hard to identify common design characteristics, however these evaluations usually include three main components: a) detailed description of how programs are operating in reality and comparison with existing guidelines of how they 'should' be operating according to the program design b) measurement using different technical methods of two dimensions - the efficacy and efficiency of the operation and c) recommendations to improve operational processes.

Implementation: Process evaluations require a combination of both desk research and fieldwork. Good process evaluations can be lengthy and relatively costly initiatives as a result of the field work, this is the case particularly when they are implemented in large programs which are characterized by numerous operations in geographically dispersed areas, which may for example have different state/local regulatory environments affecting program processes.

Specific Challenges:
- *Measuring Efficiency:* This can be technically very challenging depending on the nature of the program. For example one common challenge is tracking the time spent by employees on a particular task. Evaluators often rely on documentation such as contracts and administrative records to do back process tracing. Relying on documents for time information can be risky as pre-dating i.e. putting an earlier date on the document than the actual delivery, is common.
- *Scope of operational processes*: Processes associated with programs do not end with the delivery of the services. Once for example a glass of milk is delivered to a family, a range of processes will take place related to the cultural and relationship processes that will determine exactly how and by whom that glass of milk is consumed. It is important when designing process evaluations to clarify the scope/nature of processes you wish to evaluate.

- *Costliness:* Given the costliness of process evaluations, it is important to consider opportunities for saving by for example identifying common process performance information and data sources across programs operating in a specific sector. This information could be extracted in an aggregate manner without requiring that single evaluators working at the level of the program revisit this data each time. In this case a single process evaluation would be a combination of performance information extracted at a more aggregated level and process information at the program level.

Case Study: *Design of Process Evaluations in Mexico*

The process evaluation designed by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development in Mexico (CONEVAL) with support from the World Bank, provides evaluators will a detailed work plan that is split into 4 stages. The process evaluation in principle can be implemented in any federal program; the evaluations implemented are coordinated by the Annual Plan of Evaluation (see Note.1 of this series)

Stages and Objective	Technique & Products
Stage 1: Description of the Program and its Processes	Evaluators are asked to provide detailed descriptions of a) operation of programs based on existing norms and guidelines b) operation of program based on direct observations in the field. Data Collection Methods: Existing Norms, In depth interviews, semi structured interviews, structures questionnaires
Stage 2: Categorization of processes	Evaluators are asked to categorize processes into 8 pre-identified areas: 1. Planning Processes 2. Information Dissemination about support/service 3. Requests for support/services 4. Beneficiary selection 5. Production and Procurement 6. Distribution Mechanisms 7. Delivery Mechanisms 8. Follow up Mechanisms to determine if use of support has been according to program design objectives.
Stage 3: Measurement of key attributes of processes	4 Attributes: e*fficacy, timeliness, sufficiency, pertinence* Evaluators are free to choose indicators and calculation methods for measuring the performance of identified processes in the 4 attributes.
Stage 4: Description of problems, good practices and recommendations to improve operation of programs.	Required Contents a) comparison of normative and observed processes b) description of operational problems c) description of best practices d) recommendations

Particularities of the Mexican Process Evaluation:
- Terms of Reference including the 4 step work plan and a number of reporting formats, have been developed by CONEVAL to provide detailed guidance to evaluators and foster standardization across the public administration
- Though providing evaluators with a clear roadmap, the methodology used for the 'measurement' of the processes (stage 3) is left to the judgment of the contracted evaluators.
- The Evaluation includes questions relating to the interaction of processes between the federal and state level, this is of interest due to the decentralized nature of the Mexican federal system and the desire of decision makers to understand the effects of decentralization on the performance of programs.
- It is an explicit objective of CONEVAL to create a data base of process evaluation over time which will enable Meta analysis of processes within the public administration and to thus understand better

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Other Process Evaluation Examples:

Young, D.R., Process evaluation results from a school- and community-linked intervention: the Trial of Activity for Adolescent Girls (TAAG). Health Education Research 2008 23(6):976-986. Available at www.oxfordjournals.org

La Vigne, N., Lawrence, S., Process Evaluation of the Pennsylvania Community Orientation and Reintegration (COR) Program, Urban Institute, September 2006, Available at www.urban.org

Hong, Y., Mitchell, S., Peterson, J., Tobin, K., and Gann, D., Ethnographic Process Evaluation: Piloting an HIV Intervention Program among Injection Drug Users, International Journal of Qualitative Methods 4 (1), March 2006. http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/4_1/pdf/hong.pdf