



## Half full or half empty?

### The State of Development Evaluation 2013 Survey Report

Society for International Development  
and Charney Research



# 2013 State of Development Evaluation Survey

## About the Report

Evaluation is a much-discussed topic among development professionals. In 2011 USAID released a new evaluation policy that emphasized systematic collection of information and evidence to measure program performance and impact. Yet remarkably little is known about what is actually done in the field.

This survey report from the Society for International Development-Washington Chapter (SID-W) and Charney Research details the current state of development evaluation, including the needs and challenges of development practitioners.

The online survey was fielded between January 18 and February 10, 2013, and emailed by SID-W to its mailing and membership lists. The sample included 624 respondents, featuring a mix of funders and contractors, experienced senior executives as well as mid-level and junior development professionals, all working across a broad variety of fields and regions.

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# 2013 State of Development Evaluation Survey

## Who should read this report?

This report is for professionals concerned with evaluating development projects—including development funders, contractors, and evaluators. It provides a snapshot of evaluation in practice and knowledge about evaluation procedures and guidelines throughout the development community. This includes projects for development, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance programs.

Those directly involved in evaluation can use the report to see how their own work and knowledge compares with the rest of the field. By benchmarking in this way, you can help meet your client's or organization's expectations, while helping keep them realistic.

For policy-makers, the report offers an overview of the development evaluation field in the wake of recent efforts to encourage and improve evaluations. You can use it to measure how far we have come, how much further there is to go, and ways to promote further progress.

To SID-W, it provides a chance to give our members a sense of where things stand in a key part of the development world. It also helps us discover what our members want and need to better cope with the demands of the field.

For Charney Research, this is the first such survey—but we hope it will not be the last. We believe evaluation is likely to grow ever more important in a world of constrained resources and results-oriented management. We welcome your feedback on this report and any suggestions for changes in the future.

Katherine Raphaelson  
Craig Charney  
October 2013

SID-Washington & Charney Research Report:  
The State of Development Evaluation 2013



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Just under half of development projects and proposals include both impact and performance evaluation, regardless of overall project budgets. Both types are likelier only when more resources are specifically committed to evaluations.
2. Few projects include both baseline data collections and final evaluations.
3. Evaluation budgets run below USAID guidelines half the time.
4. Few respondents are very satisfied or dissatisfied with evaluations actually conducted; most are fairly satisfied. However, dissatisfaction is much more frequent when evaluation spending runs below the USAID guidelines.
5. Development professionals are saying they need help most with three areas related to evaluation: methodology, capacity building, and resources.
6. Local evaluators work with internationals on most evaluations.
7. Some development professionals are unaware of USAID evaluation definitions and guidelines.
8. Websites are the leading source of information on development evaluation, while the World Bank Development Impact blog is the most widely accessed.
9. Websites and live events are the most popular sources for evaluation education. Development professionals are quite interested in SID-W initiatives in the field, especially online groups, one-day workshops, and webinars.
10. General methodological topics on development evaluation have the greatest appeal to survey respondents.

# METHODOLOGY

# 2013 State of Development Evaluation Survey

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This is an online survey of development professionals fielded between January 18 and February 10, 2013. The Society for International Development – Washington Chapter used its member and general email lists to send the survey via email to more than 10,000 development professionals. 624 respondents began interviews and 442 completed it.

The survey questionnaire was prepared by Dr. Craig Charney and Shehzad Qazi. Dr. Charney and Mr. Qazi conducted the analysis and reporting. Erika Schaefer designed the report.

At SID-W Alayne Potter and Danielle Kalil provided feedback and revisions on the questionnaire. Katherine Raphaelson offered comments on the report, along with Cynthia Clapp-Wincek of USAID, Geetha Nagarajan, and reviewers at the QED Group. The survey was emailed by SID-W to its list of development professionals.

Shehzad Qazi (Charney Research) and Cristina Busbee (SID-W) managed the project with support from Amrit Singh, Nicholas Chandler and Erika Schaefer (Charney Research).

## RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

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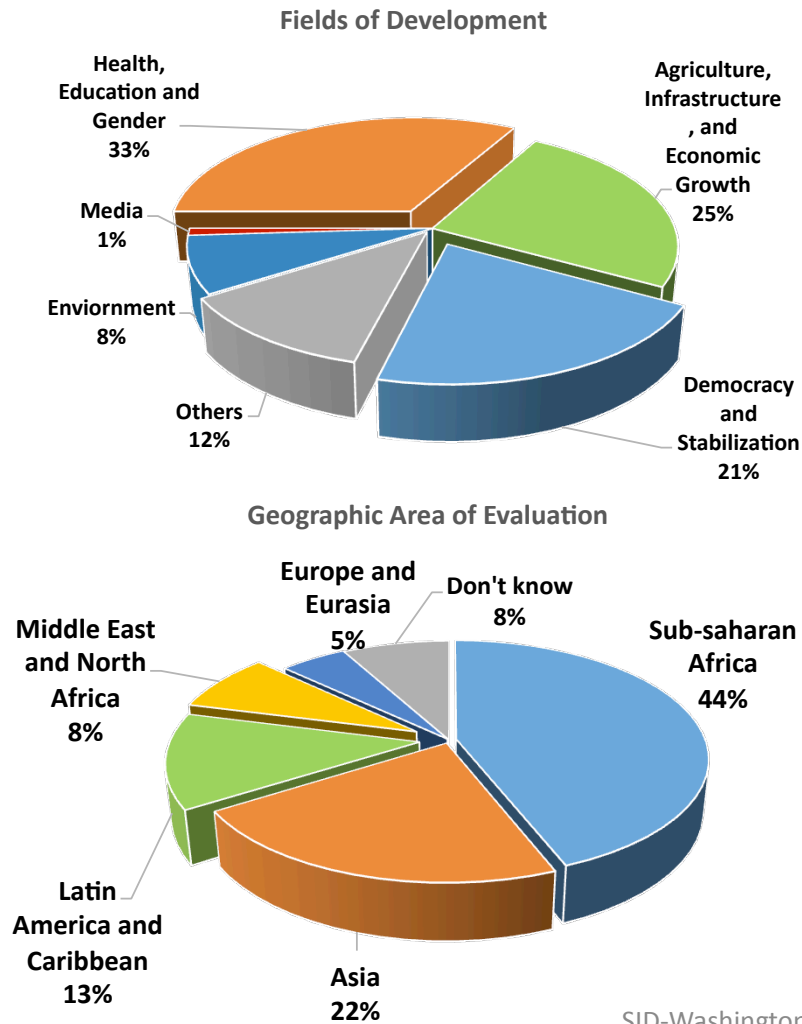
Approximately half (48%) of respondents are evaluators themselves or work for organizations doing evaluations, approximately one-quarter work for funders (24%), and the remainder focus on other areas (academic, students, etc.) or didn't specify.

Most respondents are fairly senior: three-fifths are project managers or higher, and one-third are high level (17% C-suite, 16% Director-level). One in four are in junior positions: assistants, associates, or team staff made up 16%.

The average number of years in the field is 15. About two-fifths (42%) of the respondents had worked in development evaluation for fewer than 10 years, 35% between 10 and 20 years and just over a fifth (22%) for more than 20 years.

Almost all respondents (89%) worked on evaluation proposals or projects in 2012, and the average number was 8.

# RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS



Respondents do evaluation work in a wide variety of fields and regions, though projects in Africa are most strongly represented, as is true among SID-W members in general.

By field, the most recent evaluation project or proposal for nearly one-third was in health, education, and gender, with roughly one-fourth in agriculture, infrastructure, and economic growth. For one-fifth of respondents, the most recent evaluation project or proposal was on democracy, governance, and stabilization. Environment made up 7%, while only 1% were in media.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 44% of projects/proposals. Just over one-fifth were in Asia, of which Afghanistan and Pakistan made up one-third. One out of eight were in Latin American and the Caribbean. Just under a tenth were in the Middle East and North Africa, while a mere 5% were in Eastern Europe.



# DEFINITIONS

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USAID ADS 203 (2003)

Impact evaluations: Measure the change in a development outcome that is attributable to a defined intervention.

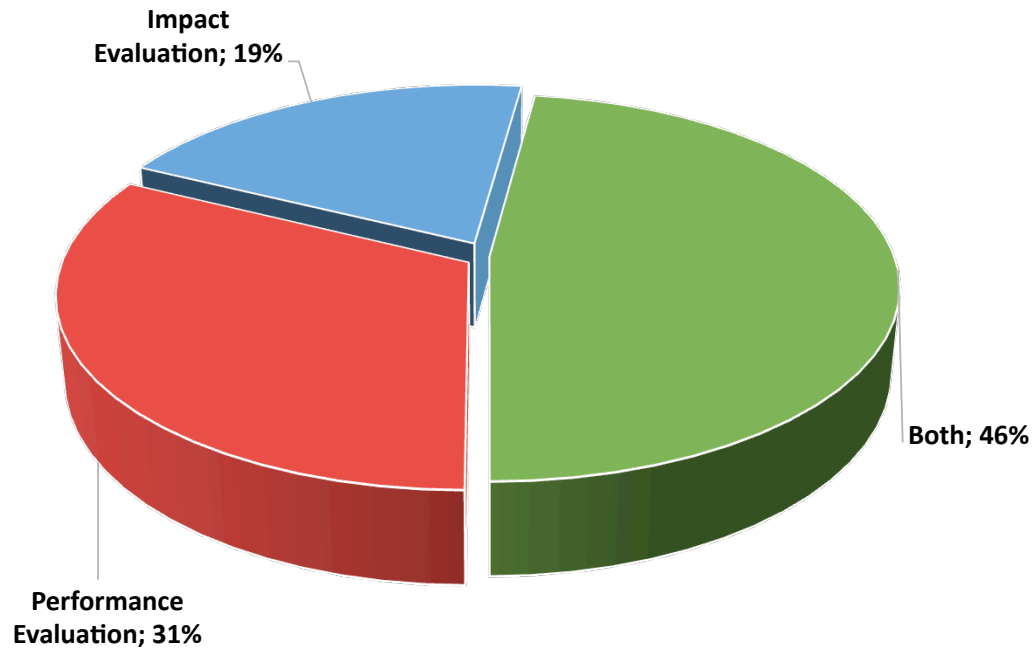
Performance evaluations: Focus on descriptive and normative questions: what a project has achieved, how it is being implemented, how it is perceived and valued, and whether expected results are occurring.

Performance monitoring: The ongoing and routine collection of performance indicator data to reveal whether desired results are being achieved and whether implementation is on track.

# **METHODS AND RESOURCES**

# EVALUATION TYPES

Evaluation types used in most recent projects and proposals

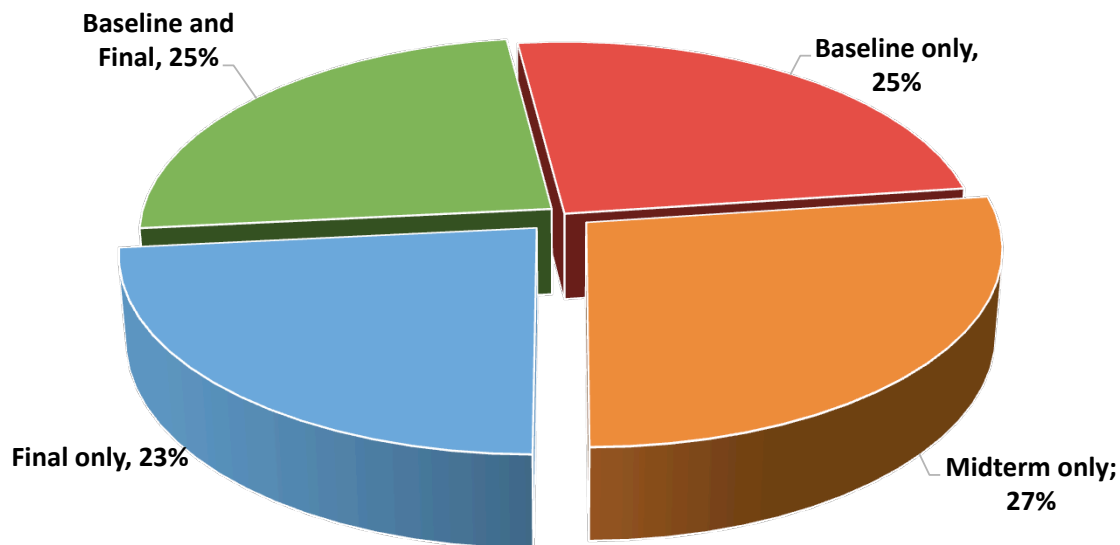


Nearly half of all projects and proposals involve both performance and impact evaluation. Three in ten included only performance evaluation and two in ten only impact evaluations.

Surprisingly, projects with bigger overall budgets are not likelier to have both types of evaluations. The main determinant is the size of the evaluation budget. When resources are committed to evaluation, projects perform both types.

# EVALUATION STAGES

Stages of Data Collection



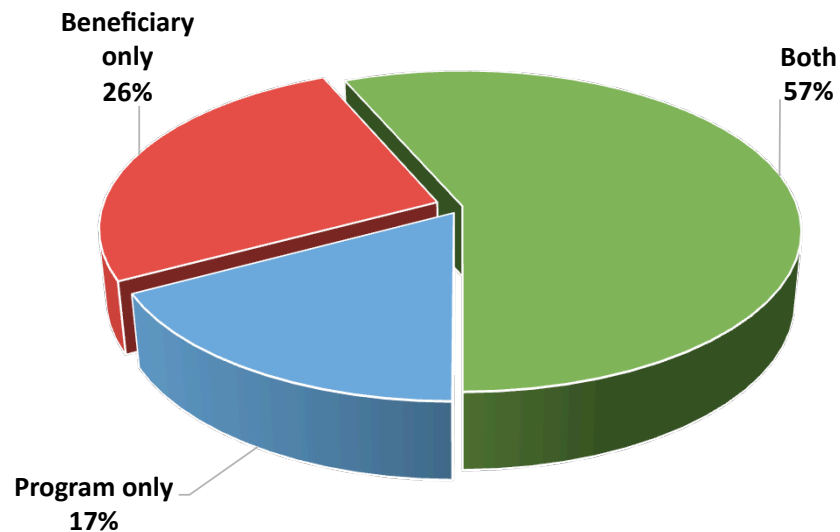
Only one-fourth of all projects and proposals included both baseline and final evaluations.

A quarter of the respondents did only baseline or final assessments.

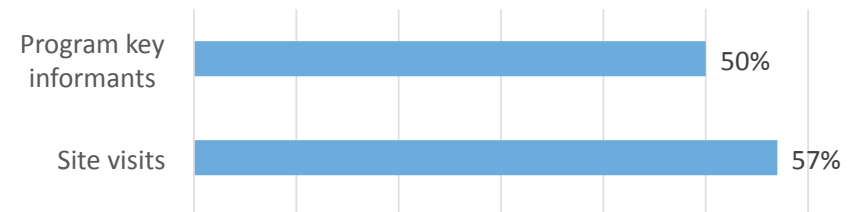
Interestingly, 27% reported conducting only midterm evaluations without baseline or final studies.

# EVALUATION METHODS: PROGRAM AND BENEFICIARY-BASED

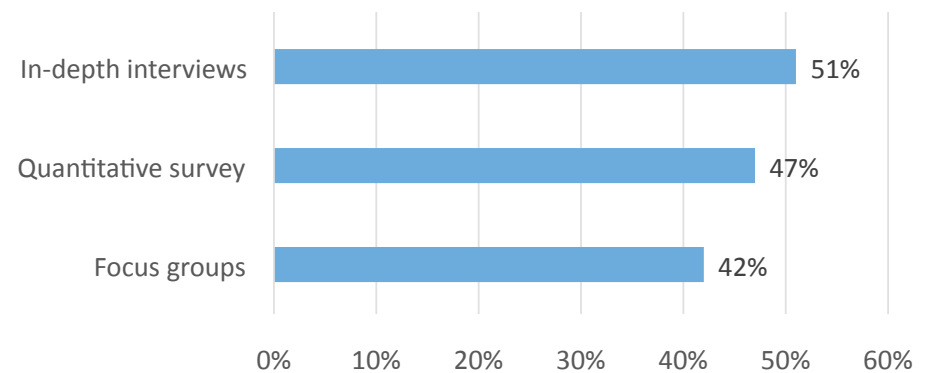
Use of program and beneficiary based evaluation methods



Program-based methods

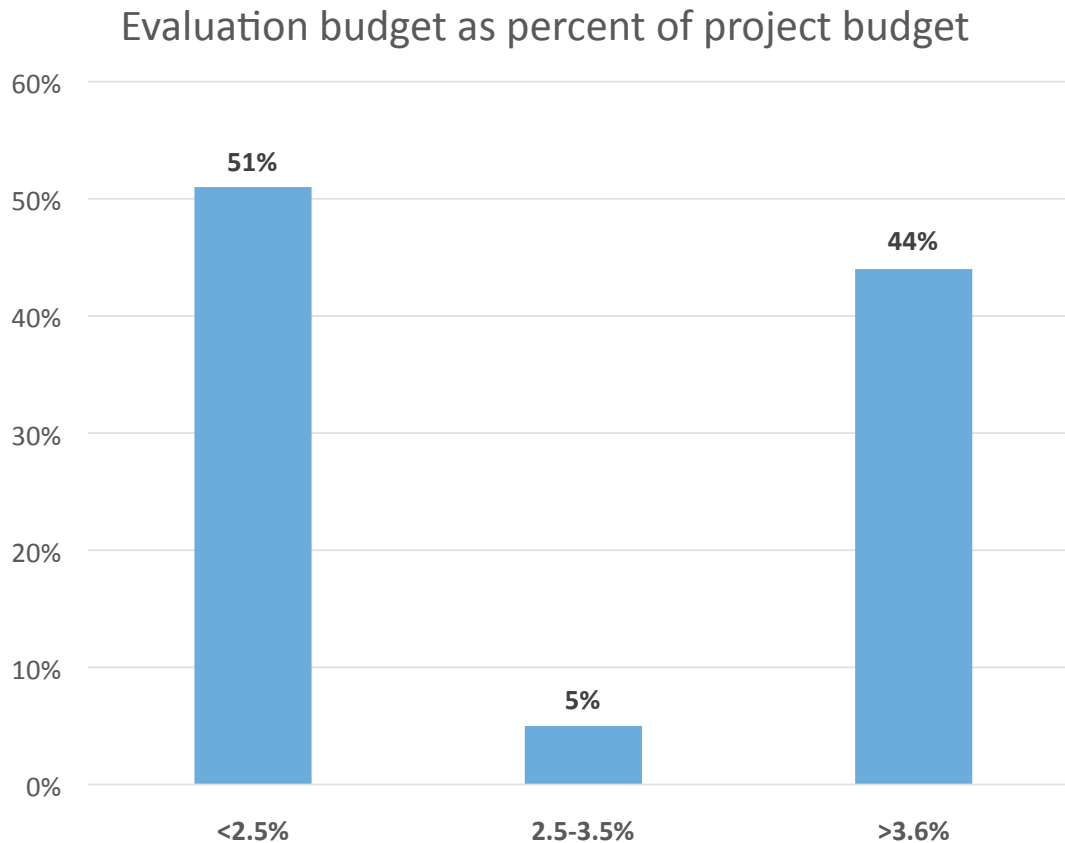


Beneficiary-based methods



Majority of projects and proposals used both program activity and research-based methods in evaluations. Among beneficiary-based methods, in-depth interviews are the most popular. Surveys and focus groups were more common in the bigger-budget projects.

# EVALUATION SPENDING



Evaluation budgets ran well below the USAID 3% minimum guideline just over half (51%) the time.

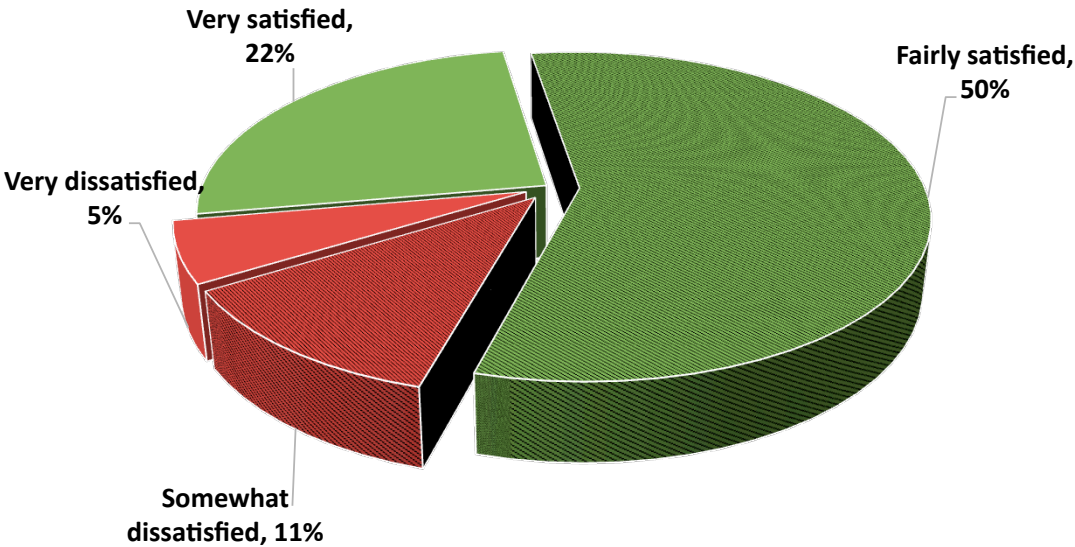
The average evaluation budget was \$1.4 million with average project budget at \$22.6 million. While this equals an average evaluation budget of 6% of the overall budget, the figure was skewed by a few big-budget evaluations.

Smaller projects (<\$1 million) also allocate smaller shares of funds to evaluations, doubly minimizing evaluation resources.

# **SATISFACTION, PROBLEMS, AND SELECTION**

# EVALUATOR PERFORMANCE

Satisfaction with Last Evaluation  
(Funders, Contractors, and Evaluators)



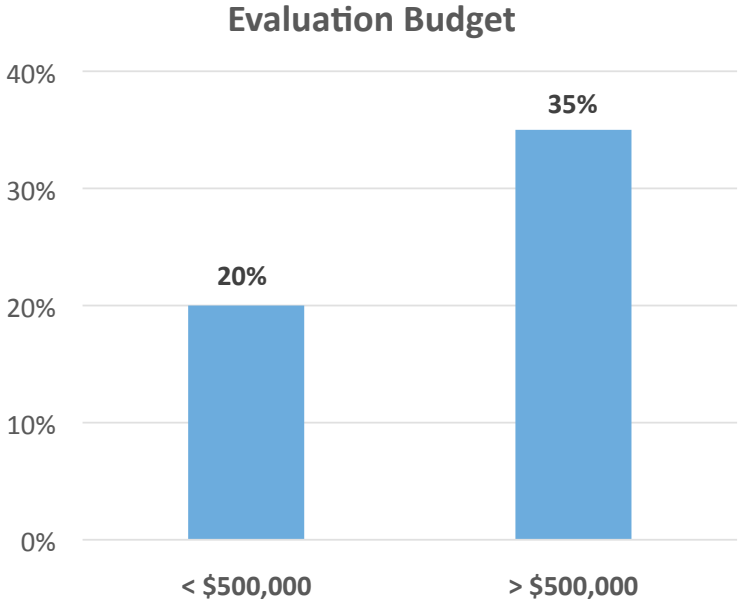
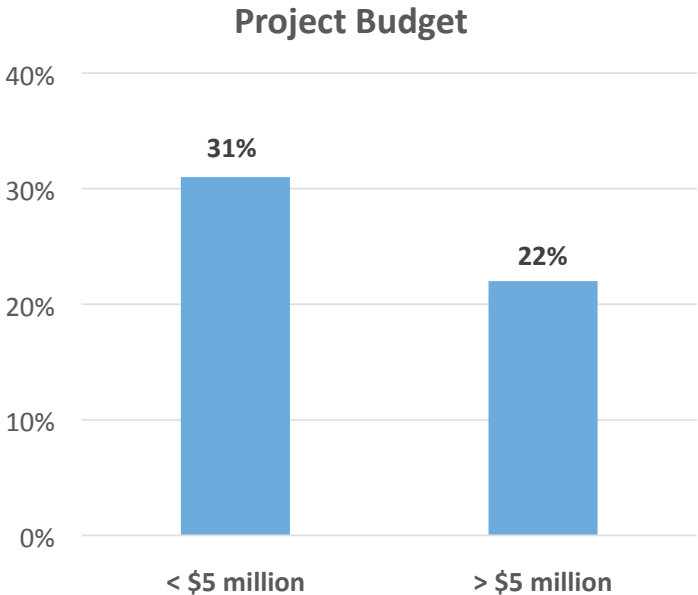
- Principal Reasons for Dissatisfaction**
- Poor reports
  - Poor methods
  - Evaluators hard to work with
  - No actionable recommendations

*Most respondents are not very satisfied with their most recent evaluation—only 22% are—though outright dissatisfaction is low. This pattern holds for both funders and contractors.*



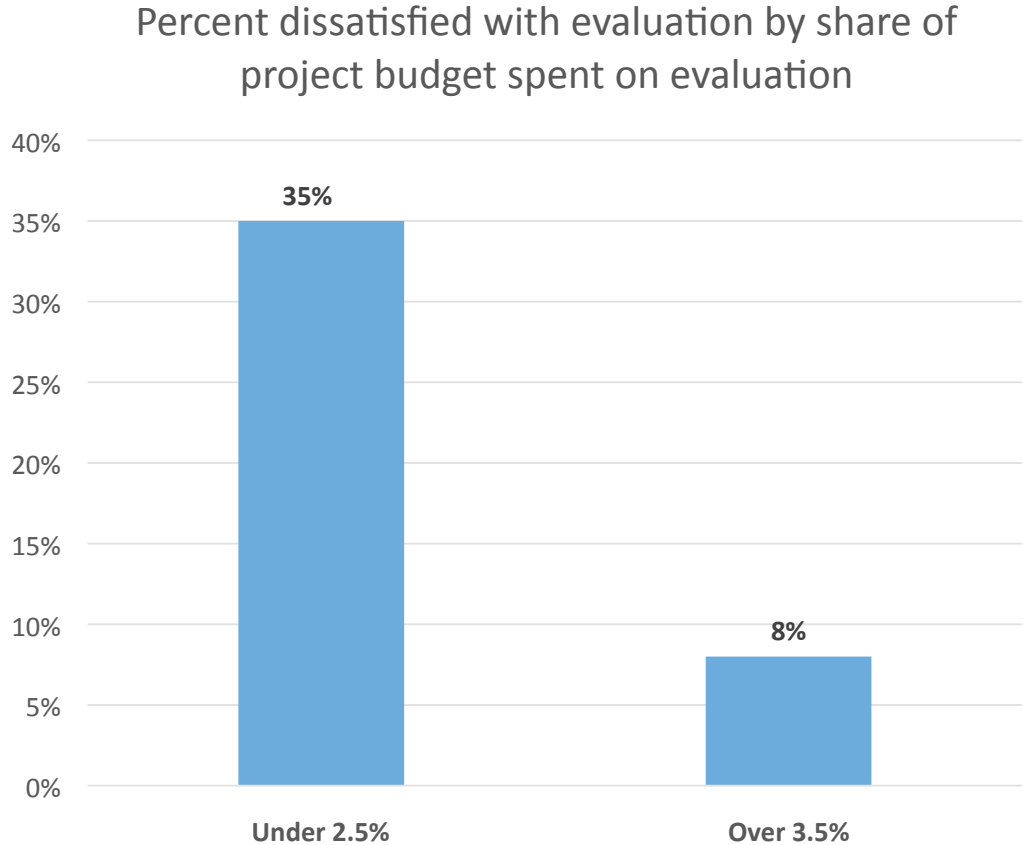
# EVALUATION BUDGETS VS PERFORMANCE

Percent very satisfied with evaluations by...



*There is no clear relationship between total project size and satisfaction with evaluations. But projects that spend over \$500,000 on evaluations are nearly twice as likely to be very satisfied with the results than those spending less.*

# EVALUATION BUDGETS VS. PERFORMANCE

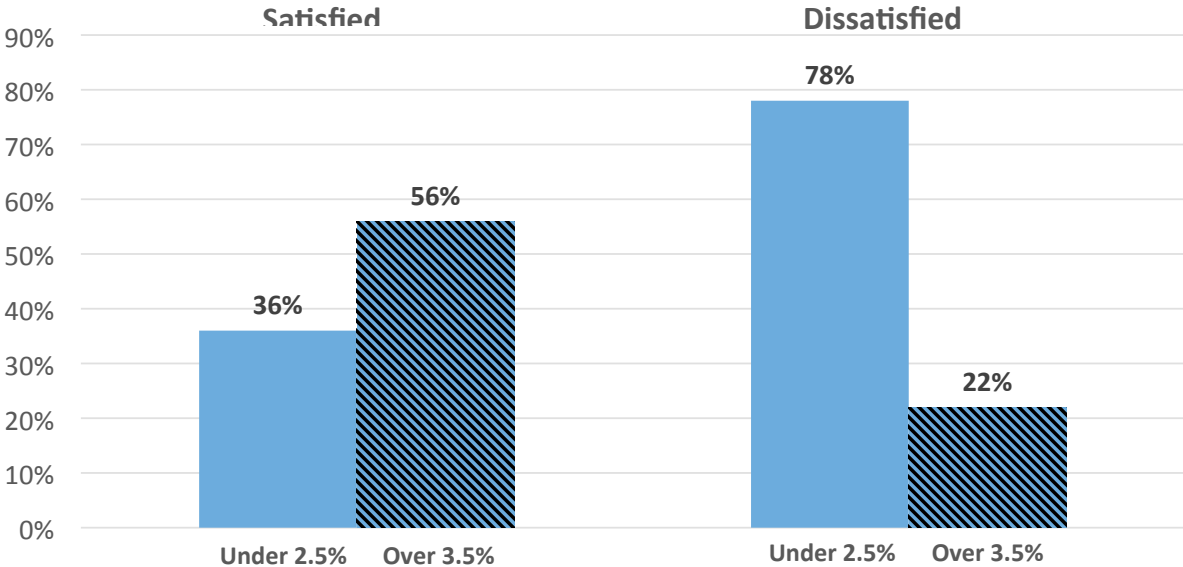


Dissatisfaction with evaluations is over four times higher among those spending under the USAID 3% budget guideline compared to those spending more.

More than one-third of those spending under 2.5% on evaluation were unhappy with the results. In contrast, only one in twelve of those spending over 3.5% were dissatisfied.

# EVALUATION BUDGETS VS. PERFORMANCE

Proportion of project budget for evaluation, by satisfaction with result:



*Among those satisfied with evaluations, most spent over 3.5%, while among those dissatisfied, most spent under 2.5% on evaluation. In development evaluation, you get what you pay for!*

# EVALUATION PROBLEMS

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Evaluation Problems Development Professionals  
Struggle With

**Methodological issues: 42%**

- **Methods in general 28%**
- **Attribution and indicators 8%**
- **No baseline 6%**

**Capacity: 22%**

- **No M&E capacity 12%**
- **Lack local partner 10%**

**Insufficient resources: 19%**

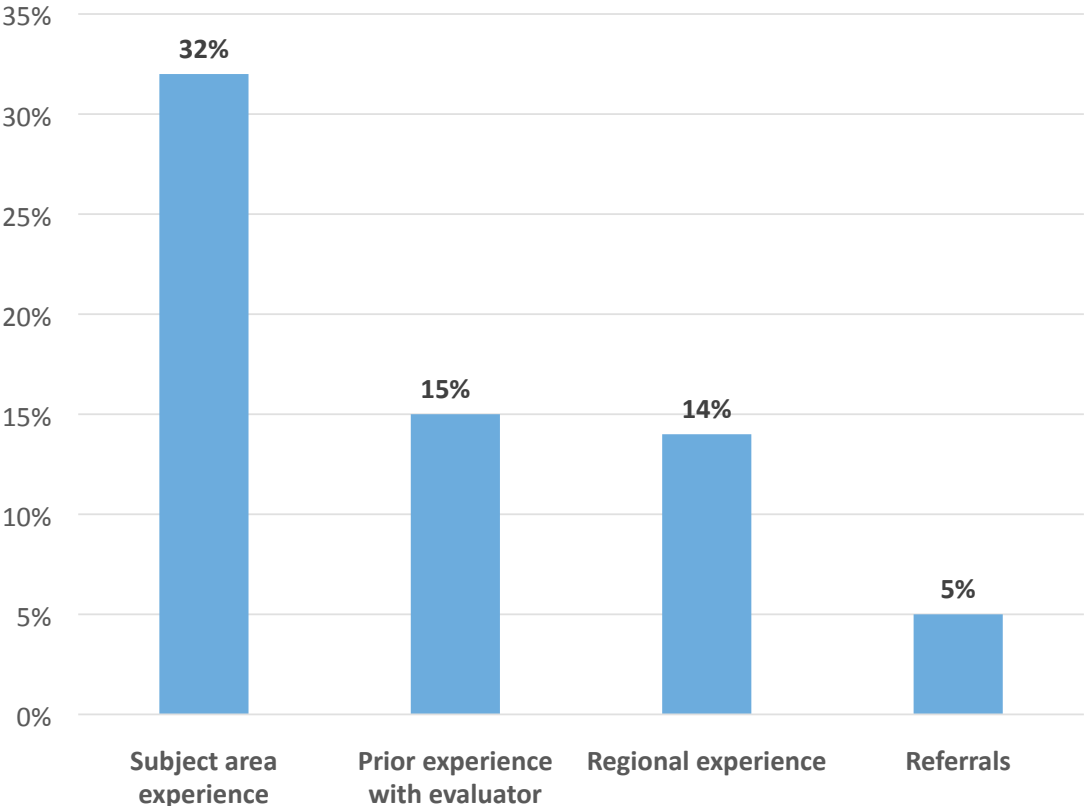
In total two-fifths of respondents said they were struggling with evaluation related problems.

The most common are methods, capacity, and resources.

The top problem in democracy projects is M&E capacity, while older and more experienced professionals are also more concerned with methodology in health, education, and economic projects.

# EVALUATOR CHOICE

Most important factors in selecting an evaluator



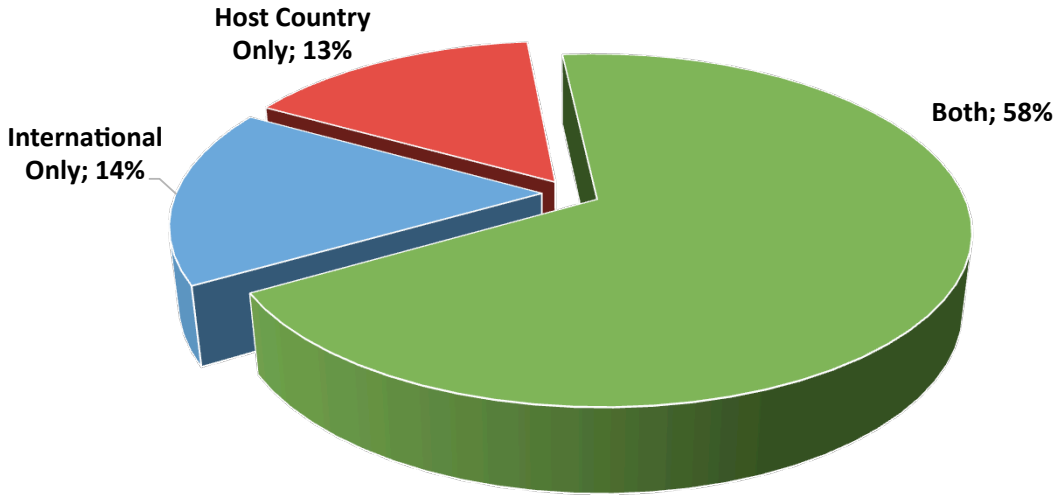
Subject expertise is the top factor in evaluator selection.

Prior experience with the evaluator and the evaluator’s regional experience rate about equally, while referrals are least likely to affect selection.

Subject matter expertise was particularly important in health and education programs, while democracy projects also emphasized regional experience equally.

# USE OF LOCAL EVALUATORS

Nationality of Evaluators



Most evaluations (three fifths) pair local and international evaluators.

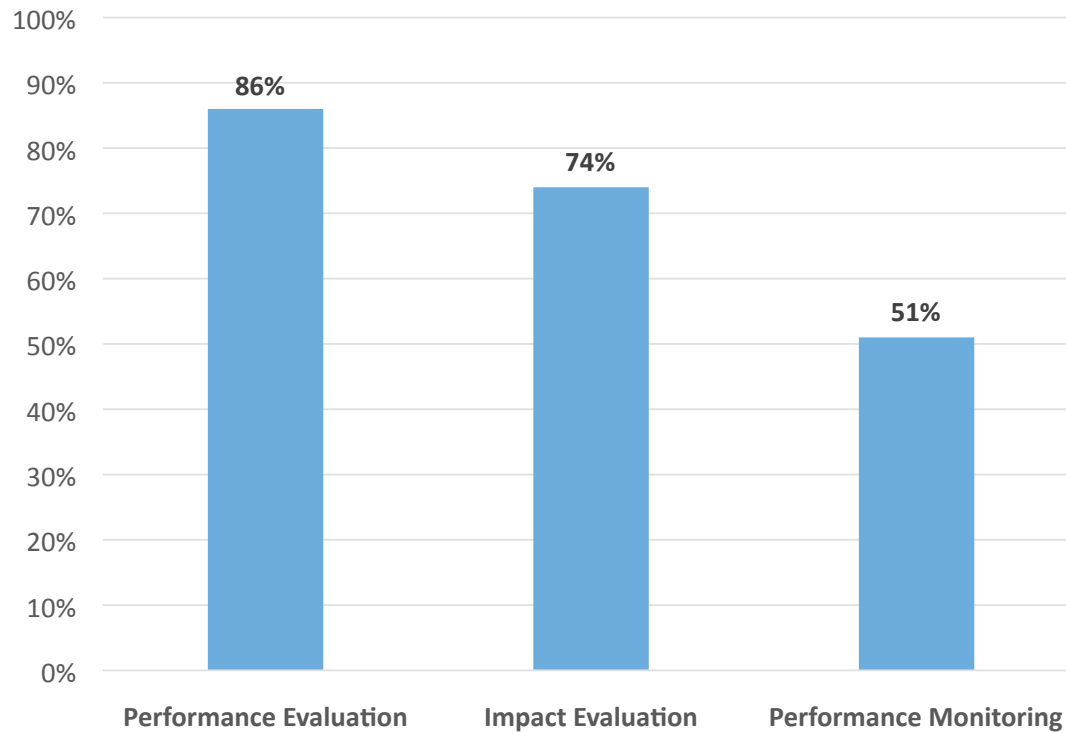
Around one in seven used either only host country or only international.

USAID’s Evaluation policy encourages the use of local evaluators.

# **KNOWLEDGE OF USAID'S EVALUATION GUIDELINES**

# EVALUATION TERM DEFINITIONS

Respondents correctly identifying USAID definitions

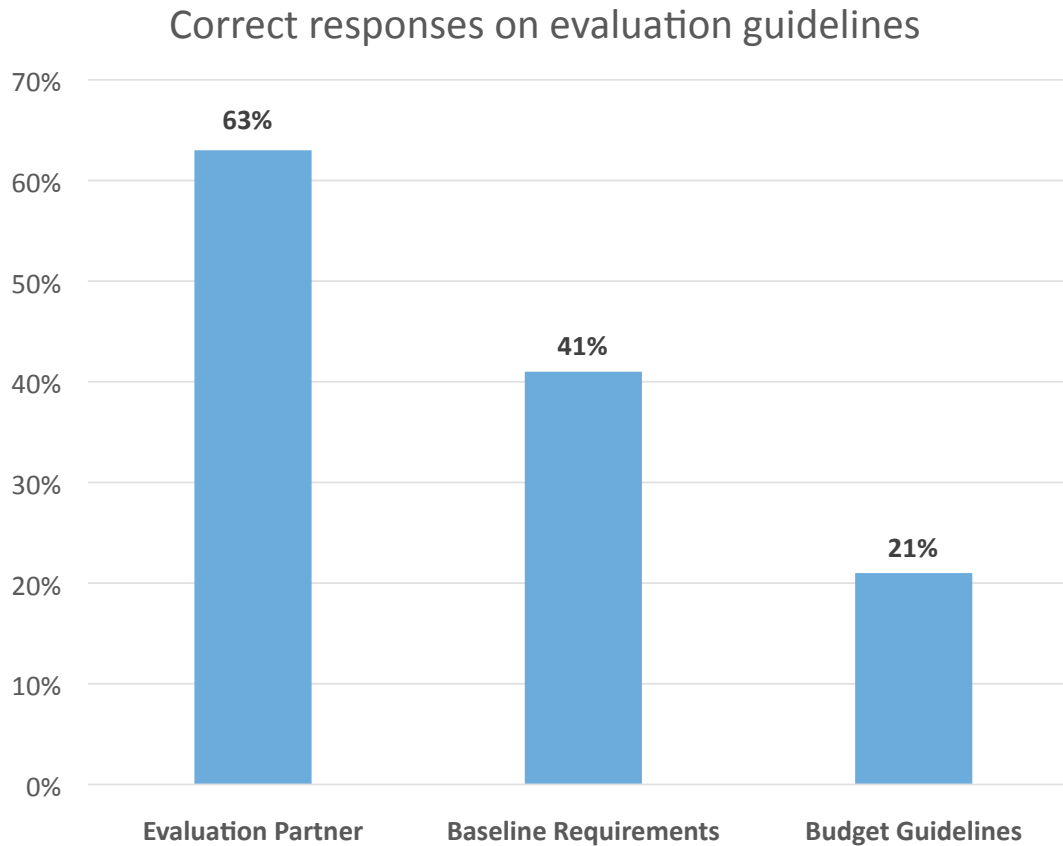


Five in six understood performance evaluation, and almost three-fourths correctly identified the definition of impact evaluation. Just over half knew what performance monitoring meant. (For definitions, see the methodology section).

Some development professionals are unaware of evaluation definitions, though many do recognize them.



# EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS



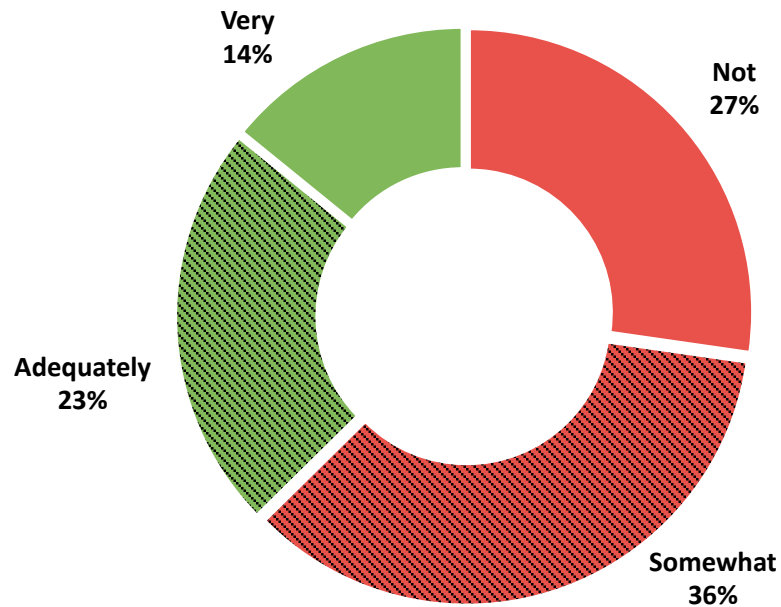
Over two-thirds correctly answered that impact evaluations had to be conducted by outside partners.

Only two-fifths knew that baseline data collection was required, while only one in five knew that USAID recommends an evaluation budget that is at least 3% of overall project budget.

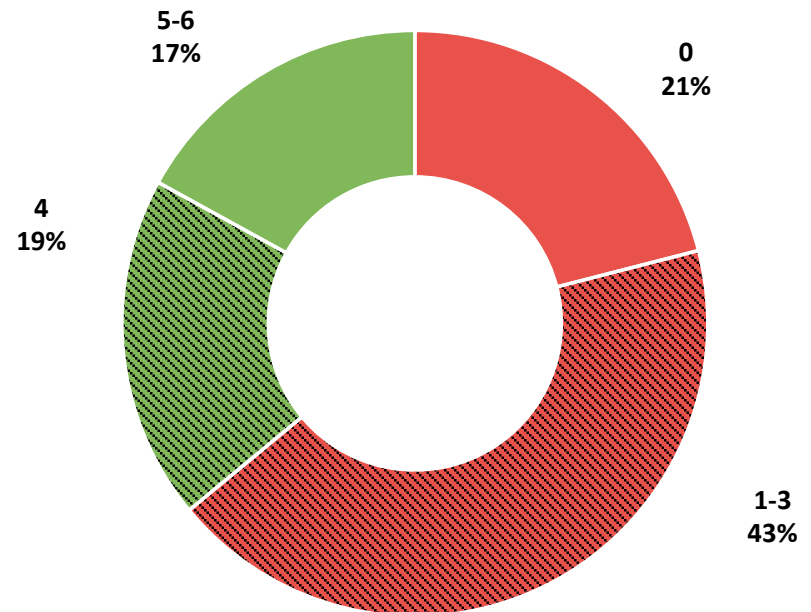
Many development professionals have a poor understanding of the evaluation methods guidelines.

# OVERALL FAMILIARITY WITH GUIDELINES

Self-assessment of familiarity



Number correct on evaluation guidelines

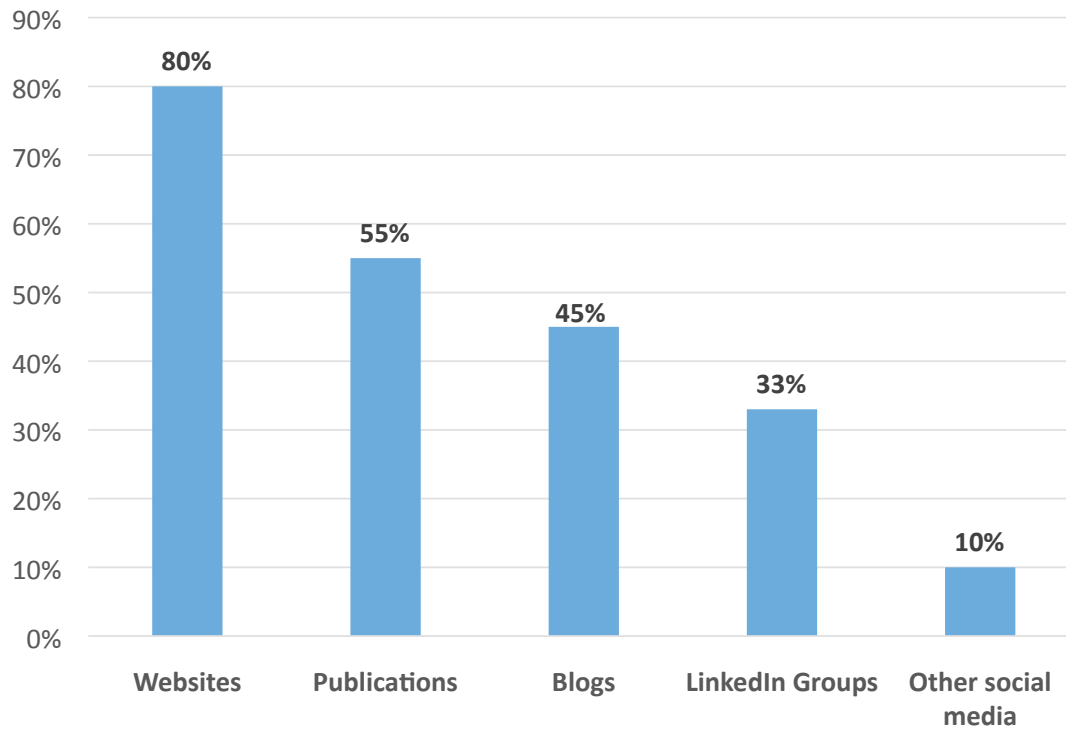


*Few respondents were very knowledgeable about USAID evaluation guidelines, but most had some knowledge of them. Two-fifths reported being very or adequately familiar with them and got four or more questions about the guidelines correct out of six. Differences between funders and contractors were minor.*

# **INFORMATION SOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION**

# PRINCIPAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Respondents using this source for development evaluation information



Websites are the leading source of information on development evaluation.

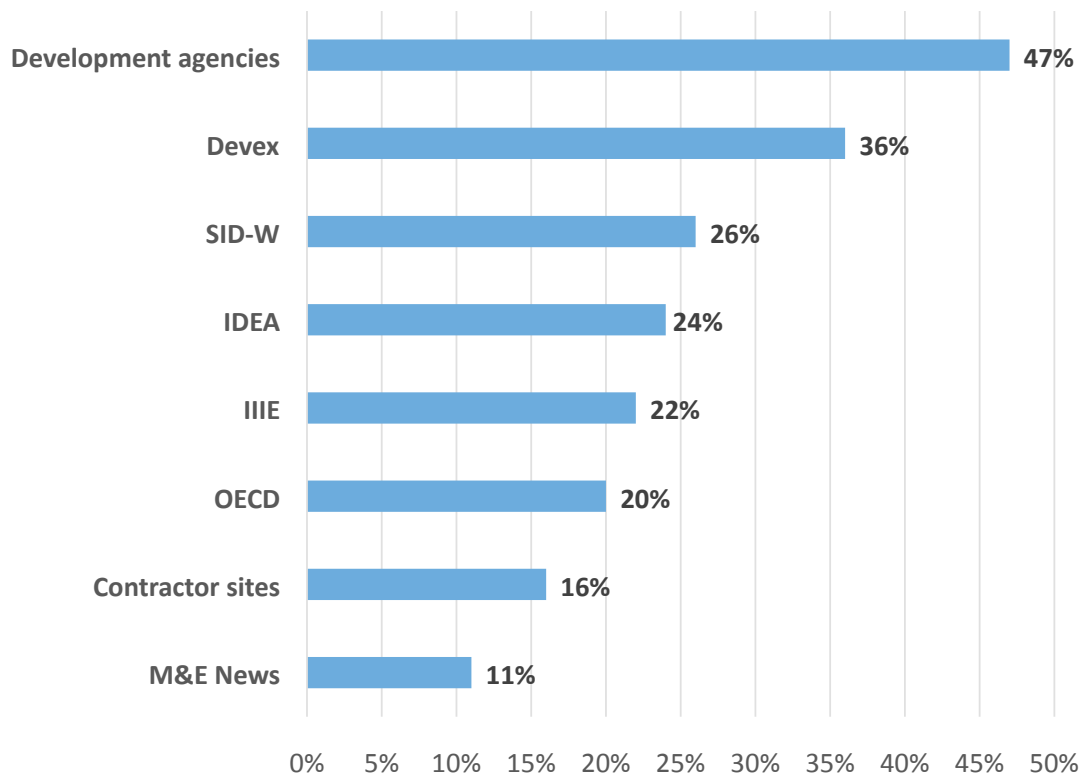
Over half of the respondents also refer to print sources for information.

Nearly half use blogs and one-third online groups.

Other social media appear nearly irrelevant, with only one in ten development professionals using them.

# LEADING WEBSITES

Most visited development evaluation sites



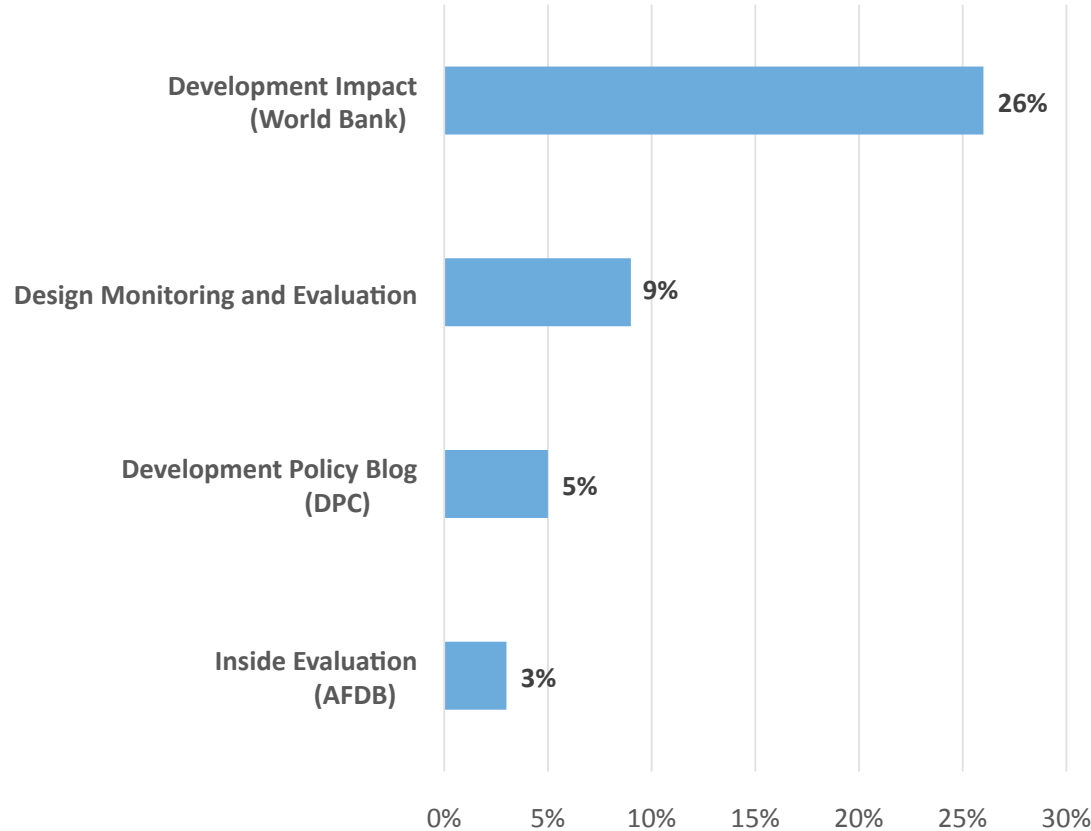
Among the most widely used websites, development agency sites and Devex are the most popular while M&E News and contractor sites are the least consulted.

Just over one-fourth visit SID-W.

From these results it appears that development professionals use websites for job searches as much as – or more than – for learning about evaluation.

# LEADING BLOGS

Most visited development evaluation blogs



The World Bank Development Impact blog is the most widely consulted.

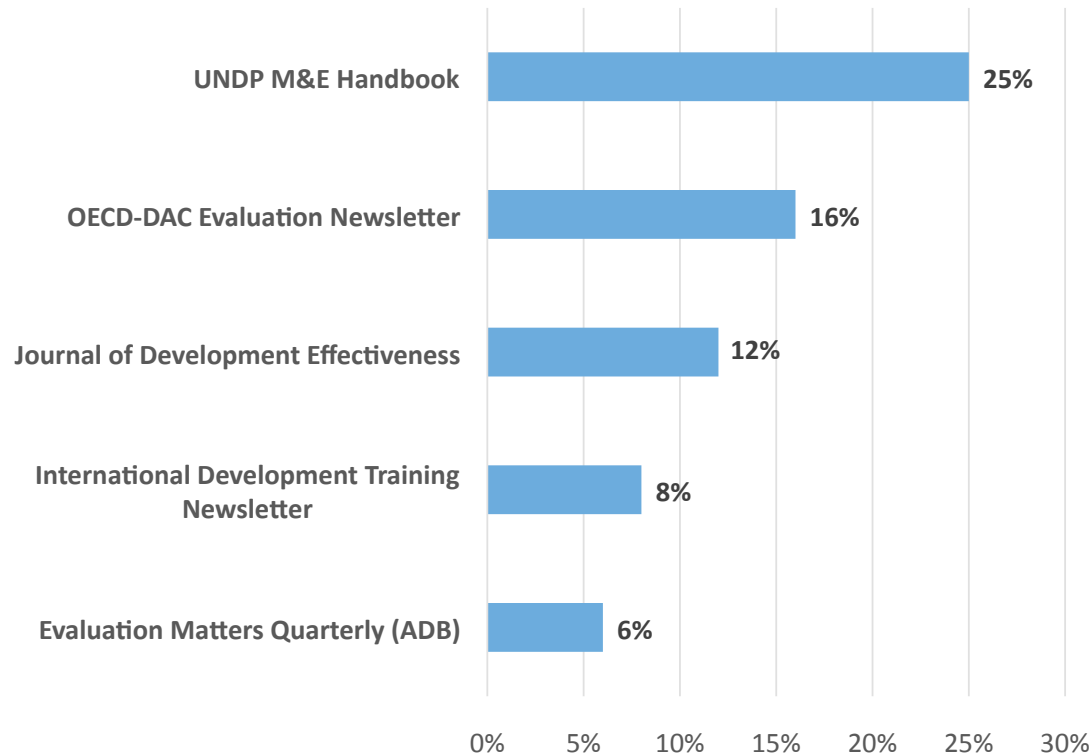
There is little difference in blog use by age or experience in the field.

Contractors consult blogs the most, while funders consult them the least.

By sector, health and education professionals also use them the most, particularly Development Impact, while economic development people use them the least.

# PUBLICATION

Development evaluation publications consulted by respondents



The UNDP Development Evaluation Handbook is the most consulted publication. Without it, however, the overall reach of print is fairly low (around 30%).

Most older, more experienced professionals (those over age 45 or with 20 years or more of experience) consult publications far more often. Around half of those who are younger or have less experience do not consult publications at all.

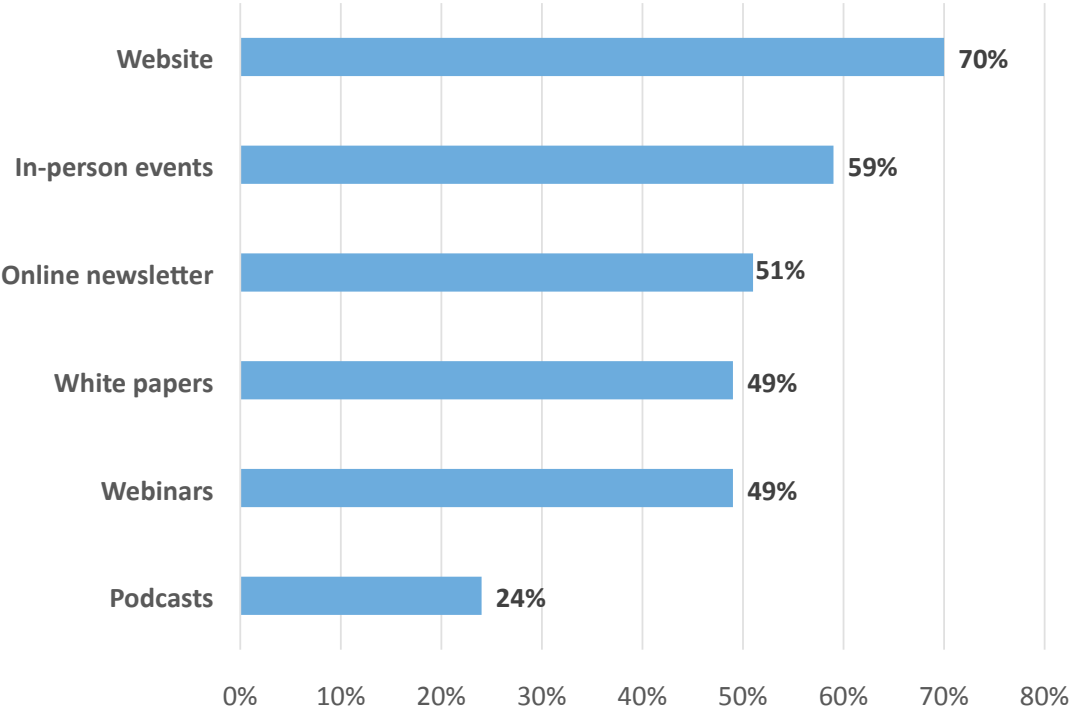
Thus, publications are moderately important, particularly for older respondents.

# **PREFERRED INITIATIVES AND TOPICS ON DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION**



# PREFERRED MEDIA

Information sources desired on development evaluation



Websites and live events are the two favorites for development evaluation information.

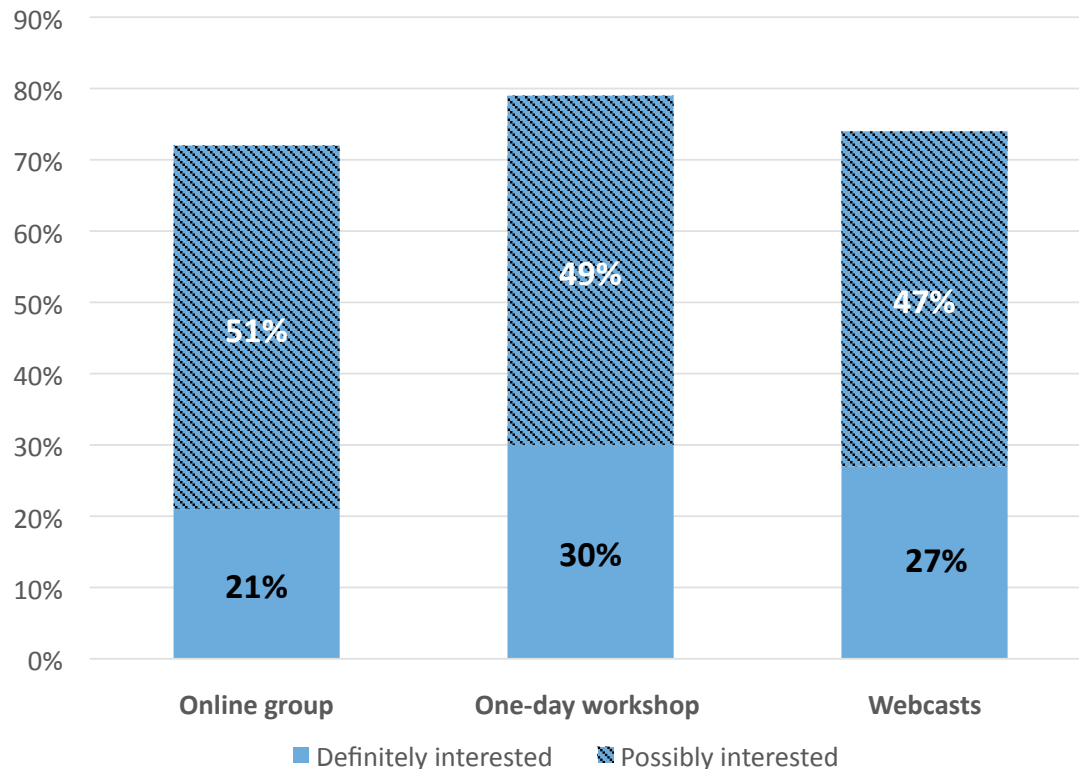
Online newsletters, white papers, and webinars all appeal to about half.

Podcasts are the least desired, requested by less than a quarter.

There is a mismatch between available and desired information sources on evaluation.

# PREFERRED SID-W INITIATIVES

Interest in SID-W initiatives on development evaluation education



There is fairly strong interest in online and in-person SID-W initiatives for development evaluation education.

SID-W already has an online group, but it is not well known.

Almost three-fourths of those interested in a one-day workshop are also interested in a series of webcasts, and vice versa.

# SID-W M&E WORKGROUP

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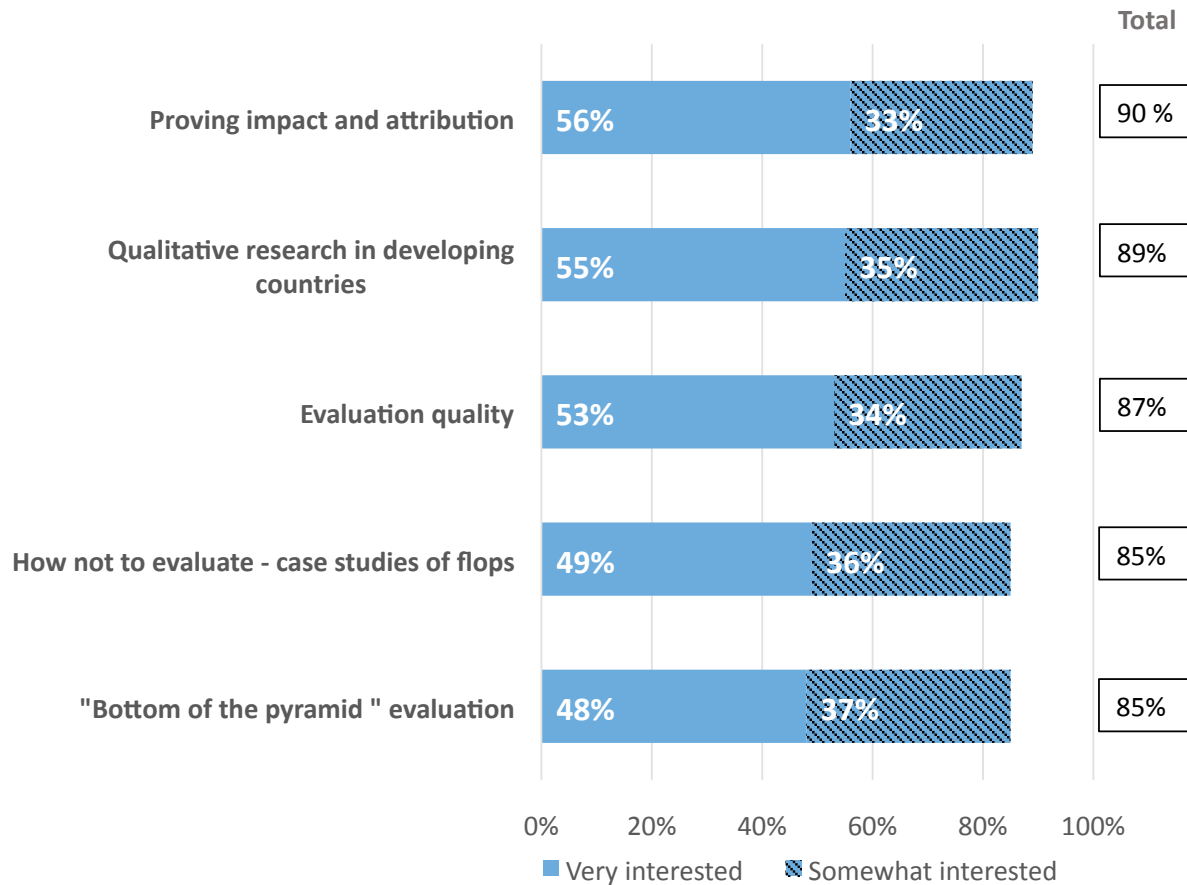
## What potential members want (Qualitative Interviews)

- A diverse group of professionals for M&E practice discussions.
- To address the knowledge gap on M&E, and help analyze and evaluate data.
- To learn how to use funds, what to achieve, and how to avoid errors.
- Case studies of evaluation and different approaches.
- A place where people share ideas for M&E and indicators and have honest discussions.
- Experts who share their experiences of how to do M&E: tools and methods to use and lessons learned.
- A forum to vet M&E designs and get collegial feedback.
- Seminars, training and a forum for people to share experiences and tools.

Though just 15% of respondents belonged to the SID-W M&E workgroup, almost half (48%) were interested in joining.

Potential members want a place to learn about M&E issues, experience, and a forum where they can discuss M&E problems they personally face.

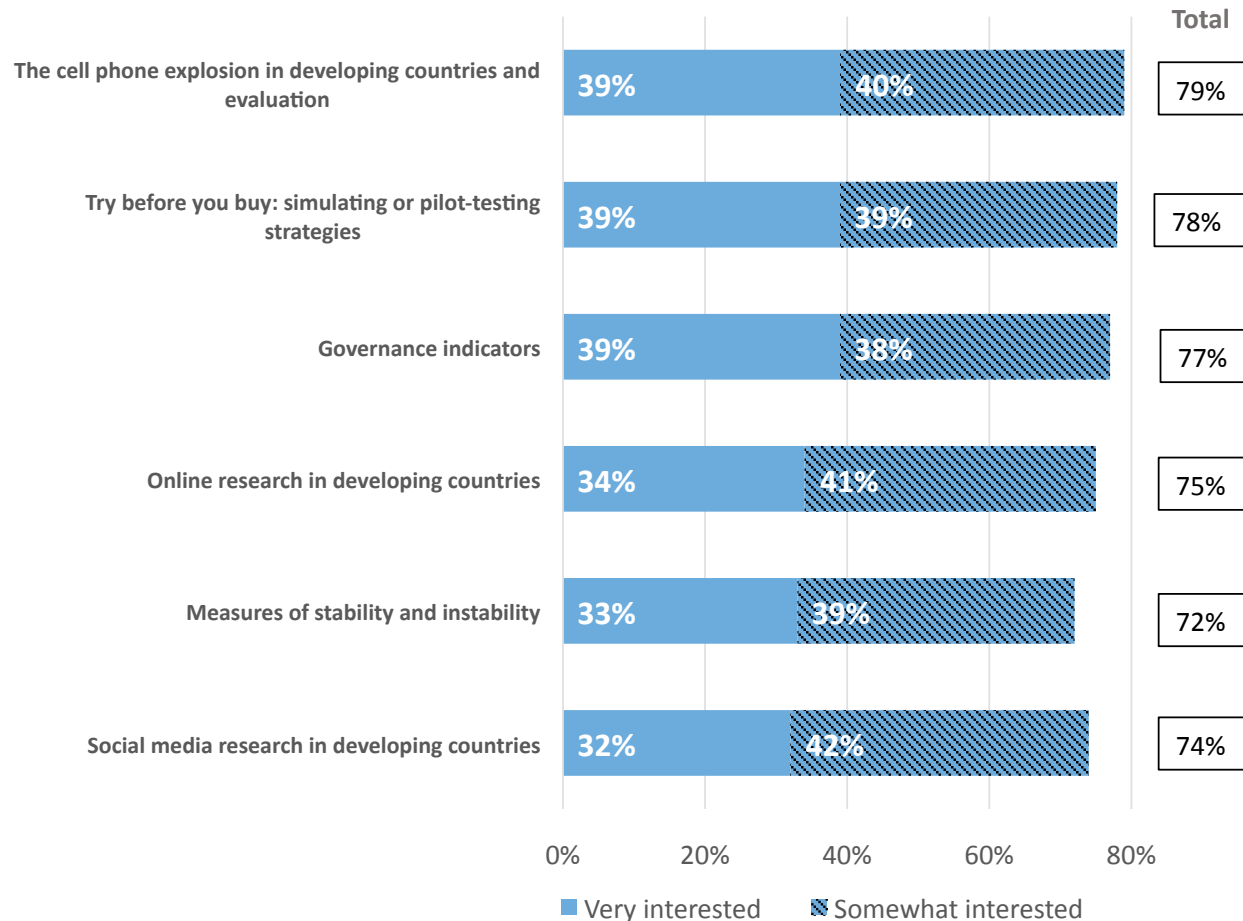
# EVALUATION EDUCATION: TOP TIER TOPICS



Half or more of the respondents were very interested, and almost all were at least somewhat interested, in these topics.

All the top tier topics are methodological, reflecting the pride of place methods held among respondents' concerns.

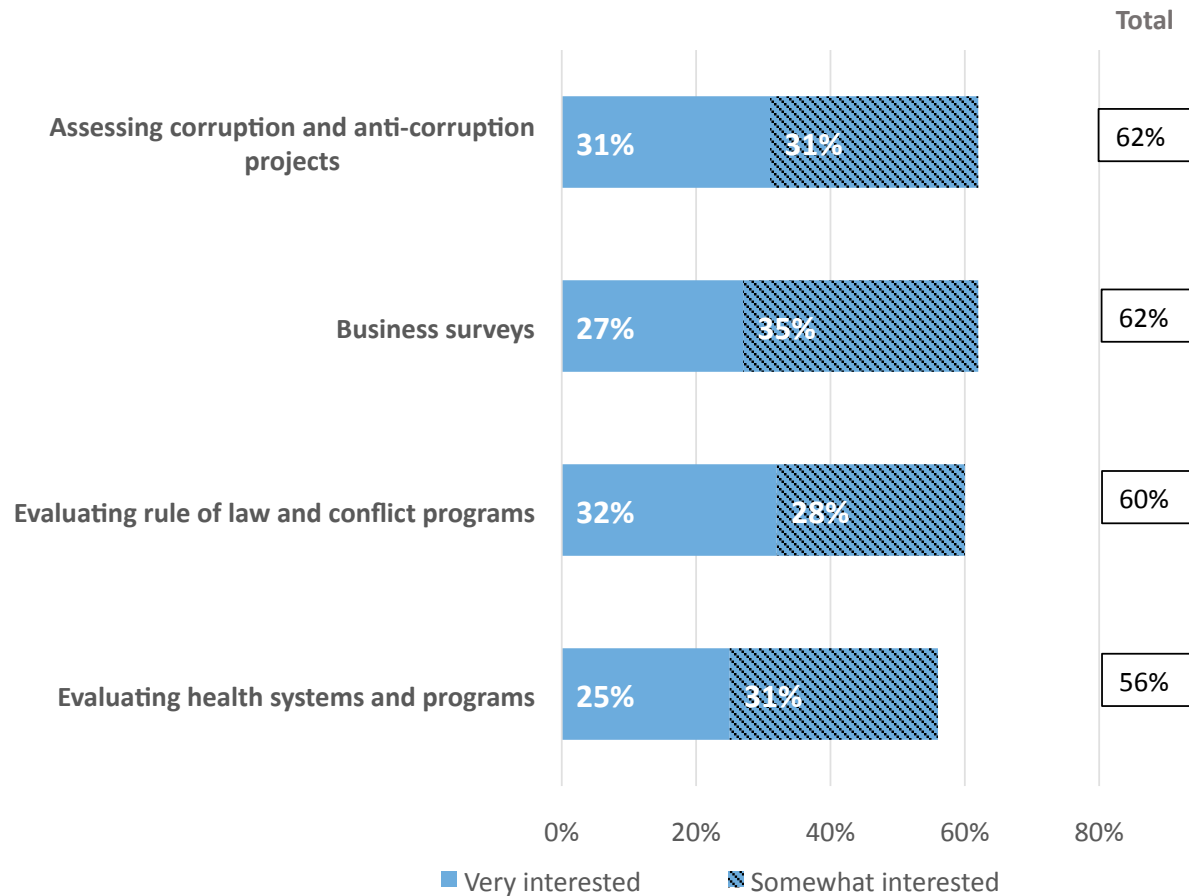
# EVALUATION EDUCATION: SECOND TIER TOPICS



The second tier topics are interesting to anywhere from three-fourths to four-fifths of the respondents.

At least one-third and up to two-fifths reported being very interested in them.

# EVALUATION EDUCATION: THIRD TIER TOPICS



These topics are less appealing to development professionals, in general, though roughly three-fifths are still interested.

They do, however, appeal strongly to the sub-groups they concern (D&G, health, economic growth), where two to three-fifths are very interested and three-fourths or more are at least somewhat interested.

# **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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- There has been a lot of progress in the evaluation field—but there is still a long way to go.
- More needs to be done, including more widespread use of both performance and impact indicators, baseline and follow-up studies, and beneficiary-based methods, as well as more adequate resourcing.
- Funder, contractor, and evaluator staff all need to learn more about USAID’s requirements and how to meet the challenges of evaluation via effective training.

## **For Funders:**

- Make compliance with the evaluation guidelines a significant factor in proposal evaluation—and make this widely known.
- Establish separate funding/contracting streams for evaluations, particularly for smaller projects which tend to have inadequate evaluation budgets in both absolute and percentage terms.

## **For SID-W:**

- Launch education initiatives, both on USAID’s guidelines and dealing with methodological and capacity issues, for members and the development community, both online and off.
- Improve M&E workgroup programming to meet the needs of members and potential members.
- Make an online M&E group a virtual clearinghouse for discussion and questions on development evaluation.



# REPORT SPONSORS

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## **About SID-W:**

SID-Washington, the largest and most active chapter of the Society for International Development (SID), is a membership-driven organization that strives to advance equitable development by bringing together diverse constituencies to debate and discuss critical ideas, policies, and practices that will shape our global future. We do this through regional and topical workgroup meetings, chapter events, and special programs. We also hold three annual events, including a conference on trends and issues in international development, a career fair for entry-level and mid-level professionals, and a gala dinner that celebrates standout achievements in our field. For more information on membership and our events, go to [www.sidw.org](http://www.sidw.org).

## **About Charney Research:**

Charney Research helps development organizations assess needs, devise strategies, and evaluate programs through survey research. We have been around 16 years. We specialize in research in developing countries and have worked in over 45 countries, from fast-growing China to crisis countries like Iraq and Afghanistan and frontier markets in Africa or Southeast Asia. Many of the world's most exacting clients rely on us for high-quality data, solid findings, and practical recommendations. They include USAID, the World Bank, the Asia Foundation, UNDP, and the Council on Foreign Relations, International Peace Institute, Center for International Private Enterprise, Voice of America, and others. We publish reports and information on development evaluation methods and findings.

For more information or to join our mailing list, contact Jeffrey Klonoski: [jeffrey@charneyresearch.com](mailto:jeffrey@charneyresearch.com).