



EVALUATION PLANNING PROCESS

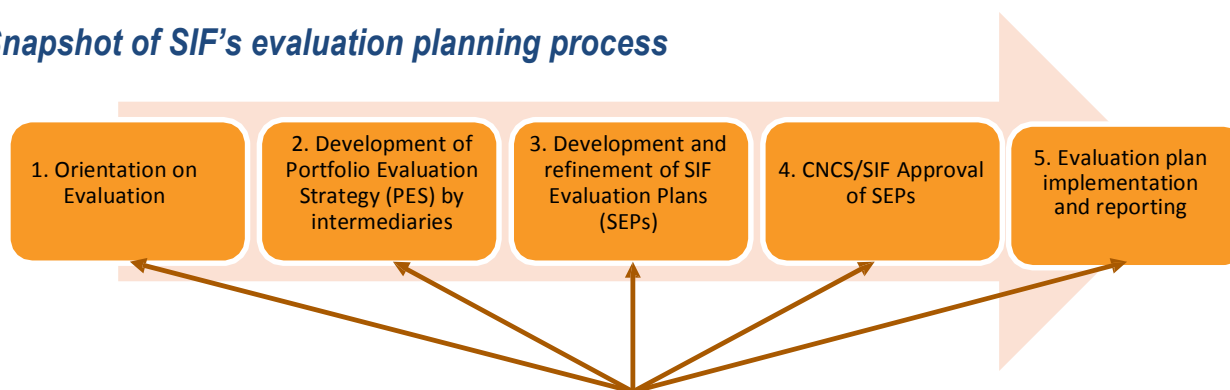
Overview

Interventions funded through the SIF must enter the program with at least a preliminary level of evidence. Then through rigorous, external, and unbiased evaluation, each intermediary is expected to ensure that the evidence base behind its funded intervention(s) is advanced and provides moderate or strong levels of evidence of impact by the end of the three- to five-year subgrant period. SIF's definitions of preliminary, moderate, and strong levels of evidence can be found in the NOFA and in "Intervention Levels of Evidence."

The Planning Process

The diagram and description below outline the evaluation planning process you will undergo if you are selected as a SIF intermediary.

Snapshot of SIF's evaluation planning process



The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) provides guidance, feedback, and technical assistance to intermediaries, subgrantees and their evaluation partners and monitors their activities at each step in the evaluation process.

1. After being selected for a SIF grant award, intermediaries receive an orientation by CNCS staff on SIF's evaluation expectations.
2. Intermediaries select subgrantees to implement interventions with at least a preliminary level of evidence.
3. Once subgrantees are selected, intermediaries submit a Portfolio Evaluation Strategy (PES) plan to CNCS for discussion and feedback. The PES provides a framework for CNCS and the SIF intermediaries to discuss how the intermediary will approach the evaluation of its portfolio of subgrantees.
4. CNCS and its evaluation technical assistance provider discuss the PES with intermediaries to clarify any questions, develop a shared understanding of the approach, and offer advice as intermediaries begin to develop their SIF Evaluation Plans (SEPs) using the SEP Guidance document provided by CNCS.

5. The next step in the evaluation planning process involves the drafting and submission of the SEP, following the guidelines provided in the SEP Guidance, which lays out in detail what should be included. The SEPs submitted to CNCS typically go through two rounds of review, feedback and revision before they are finalized, a process which typically takes six to eight weeks. The plans are approved by CNCS only when all outstanding questions, issues, or concerns about the proposed evaluations are considered and addressed.

Approved plans provide the basis for the rigorous evaluations conducted by third-party evaluators as part of the SIF program. It takes about nine months to one year following the grant awards for intermediaries to have approved evaluation plans in place.

Importance of Partnership in SIF Evaluation Plan Development and Implementation

SIF intermediaries typically work with an evaluation partner that could be internal or external to the organization. Internal evaluators are typically staff members who hold positions as evaluation officers at the intermediary organization. More frequently, evaluators are external to the organization and may be individual consultants, evaluation consulting firms or university or university-affiliated partners.

Intermediaries and their evaluation partners usually work together to oversee the evaluation work of subgrantees and provide evaluation training and technical assistance as needed. In limited cases, the intermediary evaluator conducts evaluation of all supported interventions. In others, the external evaluator works across the portfolio to support the intermediary and the subgrantees in their evaluation activities.

The subgrantees also work with other external evaluation partners who develop and implement the SEPs at the local level. Partnerships are often defined in contractual agreements at the intermediary and subgrantee level. CNCS supports intermediaries and their evaluation partners through its own set of activities. Although CNCS is in direct communication with SIF intermediaries only, as needed and at the discretion of the intermediaries CNCS communicates with subgrantees and evaluation partners.