

# **‘E-Value’: a sizing tool for evaluation practice**

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E-value is a ‘sizing tool’ developed for the New Zealand public sector evaluation context. E-value alerts both contracting agency and evaluator to any potential mismatch between the agency and evaluator’s understanding of the ‘size’ of the project, or the ‘fit’ between expectations, constraints and deliverables.

<b>Sizing Issues</b>	
<b><i>Agency’s viewpoint:</i></b>	<b><i>Evaluator’s viewpoint:</i></b>
<p>The agency is constrained by budget, timeframe and political context. It has expectations around quality and deliverables in a risk environment. In a request for proposal (RFP) situation the agency may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ receive too few responses from capable evaluators</li> <li>▪ feel that the evaluator’s tender calls for too many concessions</li> <li>▪ believe that the evaluator meets the criteria at the tender stage but then be disappointed by apparent failure to deliver to expectation.</li> </ul>	<p>The evaluator wants to conduct a robust evaluation. They want to be fairly paid for the work they do. In responding to an RFP the evaluator may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ feel that the project has been poorly specified</li> <li>▪ be unable to realistically estimate evaluation costs because the RFP lacks crucial information</li> <li>▪ be aware of a gap between the contracting agency’s expectation and the project budget.</li> </ul>
<b>Risks</b>	
<p>If there is a poor fit between the scope and the budget the risks are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ good evaluators will identify this gap and may not respond to the RFP</li> <li>▪ a less skilled evaluator may not identify the gap, may be given the contract and may not have the capability to deliver.</li> <li>▪ the agency is unlikely to have their expectations met unless the project is well scoped</li> <li>▪ the risk of project failure is heightened</li> <li>▪ relationships between agency and evaluator may become strained</li> <li>▪ exposure to risk from terminated or incomplete evaluations.</li> </ul>	<p>If the evaluator does not have clear, realistic and comprehensive information from the RFP the risks are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the evaluation is not accomplished within budget or to time</li> <li>▪ the evaluator is not recompensed for unbudgeted additional time</li> <li>▪ the evaluation product does not meet expectations or is not used</li> <li>▪ the evaluator over commits or experiences burnout and failure.</li> </ul>

One strategy for maximising the expectation / budget /deliverable 'fit' is to use a sizing tool that focuses attention on constraints and parameters within which the evaluation is to take place. Such a tool facilitates quick assessments of evaluation proposals against significant criteria. Either party can see at a glance whether they are in the 'ball park'. Just as a canary was used to alert miners to the presence of poisonous gas, a sizing tool may be used to alert the parties to an evaluation to potentially unrealistic expectations.

*E-value* is a proposed tool for New Zealand social sector use where budgets are relatively small, programme / project evaluation is a developing area and the contracting agencies are risk averse.

*E-value* is designed to support agencies and evaluators to develop a good fit between expectations and constraints in the evaluation process. It is designed to be context specific. The tool encourages the visualisation of evaluation contracts in one of four, budget-related sizes. The basic premise of the tool is that in each dollar-range there are specific constraints and issues that need to be considered in order to maintain an appropriate balance between the budget, time, data and political constraints<sup>iii</sup> under which both the agency and the evaluator are trying to operate.

A sizing tool:

1. alerts both parties to areas where detailed scoping and clarification is needed
2. provides a basis for discussion between the parties about what the project entails
3. provides an opportunity to negotiate variations in approach, budget or deliverables.

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	<b>Size 1</b>	<b>Size 2</b>
<b>Budget</b>	\$10k - \$20k GST excl.	\$20k - \$60k GST excl.
<b>Time</b>	The time frame is weeks to months.	The timeframe is within six months.
<b>Data</b>	There are few participants in one location.	There may be multiple participants but in limited locations.
<b>Political context</b>	There is one agency, one objective and limited stakeholders.	There may be one or two agencies involved but limited objectives and limited stakeholders.
<b>Evaluation approach</b>	The evaluation is formative / abductive / exploratory / feasibility.	The approach may be formative or exploratory.
<b>Skill/experience/personnel</b>	One person with the relevant skills is needed to do the work.	One lead evaluator and a small team is needed.
<b>A well scoped evaluation plan is the foundation of good evaluation. Is the tender comprehensive? If not ... further scoping will be required to clarify:</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ purpose</li> <li>▪ background and context</li> <li>▪ objectives, questions</li> <li>▪ ethics</li> <li>▪ stakeholders</li> <li>▪ project management</li> <li>▪ deliverables</li> </ul>

	<b>Size 3</b>	<b>Size 4</b>
<b>Budget</b>	\$60k - \$100k GST excl.	Over \$100k GST excl.
<b>Time</b>	Time frame six months to one year.	The time frame is between one to three years.
<b>Data</b>	There may be multiple participants, multiple locations and multiple methods.	There may be multiple participants and locations, complex methodology, multiple methods, and a wide range of data sources needed.
<b>Political context</b>	May include one or two agencies. Will include multiple objectives and multiple stakeholders.	The project is multi agency, multi-objective, and has multiple stakeholders.
<b>Evaluation approach</b>	The approach is likely to be process or outcome focused.	The approach may be strategy based or related to a major policy shift. It is likely to be process / outcome / impact focused. The evaluation may include separate but linked projects or phases.
<b>Skill/experience/ personnel</b>	A lead evaluator and a team of subcontractors is needed.	An experienced, dedicated project manager and in-house team in the contracting agency is required. The project requires sophisticated project management and staff management skills in the agency and in the evaluation team. Each sub project or phase needs a lead evaluator and subcontractors.
<b>Is the tender comprehensive? If not ... further scoping may be required prior to determining evaluation budget to clarify:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ multiple stakeholders</li> <li>▪ composition and role of advisory groups</li> <li>▪ multi-methods</li> <li>▪ multiple respondents</li> <li>▪ specialist interviewing (ethnicity, gender, age, language, or religious issues)</li> <li>▪ access to participants</li> <li>▪ risk management</li> <li>▪ multiple reporting milestones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ dedicated project management</li> <li>▪ project phasing / multiple time frames / complex reporting</li> <li>▪ teams and groups (work teams / advisory / steering / management / reference groups)</li> <li>▪ Memoranda of Understanding and agreements (MoU)</li> <li>▪ multi-site management strategies</li> <li>▪ multi-stakeholder / stakeholder management</li> <li>▪ deliverables to multiple / complex expectations</li> </ul>

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