

Top Five Essential Reforms for the Monitoring and Evaluation of U.S. Foreign Assistance

The House, Senate, and Obama Administration have all announced ambitious plans for the essential reform and improvement of U.S. foreign assistance. A vital component that is contained in all of the reform proposals is the requirement to strengthen the U.S. government's ability to monitor and evaluate foreign assistance programs. Measurement and evaluation activities improve program effectiveness and help ensure the most efficient use of limited resources. The inclusion of robust monitoring and evaluation ("M&E") provisions in each proposal – particularly the use of impact evaluation – is an important advance in ensuring that foreign assistance produces the desired results.

As debate over foreign assistance reform continues, the Lundy Foundation wants to ensure that the following five reforms related to M&E are included in any final legislation. Indeed, the Lundy Foundation believes that these reforms must be codified in legislation to better ensure that they survive through future Administrations. Corresponding regulations, guidance, and policies should then be promulgated by the appropriate federal departments and agencies.

1) Evaluation of All Foreign Assistance Programs – Each and every foreign assistance program – whether carried out by USAID, the State Department, or any other federal department or agency – should be required to conduct some form of M&E in order to demonstrate “results” (or lack thereof) both in the short and long terms. While impact evaluation is essential for evaluating the success of complex programs, simpler forms of evaluation, such as measuring outputs and outcomes, can often be used for less complex programs.

2) Adequate Funding – The M&E required by each program must be adequately funded. Departments and agencies should set an evaluation plan and budget prior to the initiation of any foreign assistance program. Importantly, Congress should authorize and appropriate adequate funding for effective M&E, mandating that such funds must be used for M&E activities.

3) Lessons Learned and Transparency – A mechanism must be established for program administrators and agency officers to have timely access to the program evaluation results which can be used both in the short and long term to improve programs. Congress should require the use of lessons learned to ensure the improvement of evaluated programs over time, as well as reporting on the use of lessons learned. Furthermore, all evaluation results should be published and accessible to members of the public to foster greater accountability and transparency.

4) Oversight and Coordination – Some form of coordinating body should oversee and coordinate all foreign assistance M&E conducted by all U.S. government departments and agencies. This body should also coordinate with international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

5) Local Capacity Building – Resources should be provided for local populations and aid recipients to conduct effective evaluations of foreign assistance programs themselves in order to reduce the burden on the United States and to increase the sustainability of programs.

For additional information, please contact Vic Dukay, Director of the Lundy Foundation, at (303) 589-0737 or vic@lundyfoundation.org; or Robert Kapla of Patton Boggs LLP at (202) 457-6192 or rkapla@pattonboggs.com