

Project Research Quality Self-Assessment

What is it?

The following assessment is a reporting tool intended to provoke open and honest reflection from research projects that are financially supported by The McKnight Foundation's Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP).¹

When is it completed?

The assessment is completed annually by each CCRP research project as part of your annual report to the Foundation.

The assessment can also be used during the project team's mid-year review meeting. The tool can be used to help identify and discuss areas within the project that could be strengthened.

Why?

The assessment is envisioned to help project teams (as well as the CCRP as a program) engage in critical thinking and reflection in order to continuously improve the research process, outputs, and outcomes. The tool is also used to highlight the various aspects of research quality that the CCRP believes are important. ***Note:** *The CCRP does not expect projects to be perfect. This tool is intended to help both project teams and the CCRP identify both weaknesses to address and successes to share. Neither low nor high ratings will affect current funding; rather, effort and prioritization of improving research quality are the expectations.*

Who should complete it?

Ideally, two or more members of the project team should complete the assessment together. The goal for this exercise is to surface multiple perspectives from within the project, so try to identify at least two people who would offer diverse views of the research project from their standpoint and involvement in the work.

How do I fill it out?

1. Imagine you are an external evaluator looking in on the project.
2. Review each question.
3. Reflect on the **Rating Categories** and **Guiding Criteria**.
4. Select the appropriate rating for each question based on the **Guiding Criteria** and your own criteria, if applicable.
5. Please explain each rating in the **Comment Box** by providing the evidence that supports your rating. If your own criteria for your selection differ from the guiding criteria please explain it in the comment box.
6. If a question is not relevant or you don't have adequate information, please select "Not Applicable". Be sure to explain your selection in the **Comment Box**, including how you plan on getting relevant information if you do not have it yet.

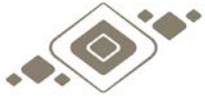
What if the guiding criteria don't reflect the current stage of my project?

Do your best to consider the stage of your project and the question at hand. If the guiding criteria aren't appropriate, please include your own criteria in the **Comment Box**.

¹ We would like to acknowledge the contributions to and inspirations for this tool from CCRP staff and consultants, the former Statistical Services Centre of the University of Reading (now independent organization Statistics for Sustainable Development), and the Policy, Strategy and Evaluation Division of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).



Question	Rating Category	Guiding Criteria	Rating (Mark with "X")	Comments
A. Overall Project Design				
A.1 How useful are the research questions or objectives? How will this project fill an important gap in knowledge? <i>(Note: More than one rating is allowed for this question)</i>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please explain in the comment box.		
	Weak	The project does not clearly show how the project's outputs or outcomes will be useful <i>OR</i> that they are indeed research objectives versus extension.		
	Validation of findings already known	The project is articulating and validating principles based on previous findings in multiple contexts.		
	Pushing the boundaries of what is known	There is strong evidence that the research is important in terms of building on existing knowledge, making improvements in existing technologies and/or methods, or validating principles.		
	Innovative and cutting edge	There is substantial evidence that the research is important in terms of extending existing knowledge, breaking new ground, or developing principles.		
A.2 How well has the project articulated where it will work, with whom, and why?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please explain in the comment box.		
	Weak	It is not clear where the project will be working and why <i>OR</i> areas are loosely designated but it is not clear why or with whom.		
	Under-developed	The project is working in clearly designated areas but there is little justification about what those areas will contribute to the research. Similarly the project has identified whom the project will be working with but there is little justification about how those partners will contribute to the research.		
	Good	The project has identified where it will work and with whom. Geographical, socio-economic, institutional and biophysical contexts have been considered.		
	Excellent	The project has identified where it will work and with whom. There has been a diagnostic process (formal and informal) to understand the inter-relationships between the geographical, socio-economic, institutional and biophysical contexts and local needs of different types of stakeholders with a sound justification for how the various forms of heterogeneity will contribute to the research.		



<p>A.3 How well does the project integrate the principles of Agroecological Intensification (AEI) and a systems perspectives?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please explain in the comment box.		
	Weak	The project strategy is entirely disconnected from using agroecological knowledge, principles, and systems thinking.		
	Under-developed	In practice the research products are not well integrated within a grounded understanding of ecological knowledge and principles. The research products are focused on one problem and do not seriously consider multi-functionality in farm systems.		
	Good	Research is grounded in and leverages agroecological principles and knowledge for improved productivity. The project considers the multi-functionality and tradeoffs of the research outputs in farm systems.		
	Excellent	Research is grounded in and leverages ecological principles and knowledge for improved productivity. Includes deep analysis of the multi-functionality and tradeoffs of the research product and the adaptive potential of the proposed research products in potential farming and market systems.		
<p>A.4 Team functioning: to what extent are the right people actively involved in the project at this stage, and how well are they working together?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please explain in the comment box.		
	Weak	Lack of collaboration among project members. Lack of functional leadership.		
	Under-developed	Some collaboration is taking place among team members but increased collaboration would benefit the project. Some of the project work is beyond the expertise of the implementing team. Minimal internal peer review. Weak or inconsistent leadership.		
	Good	The project seems to have the right people, but they might not be working as well together as they could be. <i>OR</i> They are not quite the right people but they are working really well together and are open to outside help. The project might be missing a key institutional partner, skill set, or strong leadership.		
	Excellent	Strong mentoring and training, diverse project team that works well together. The project team members undertake participatory planning and reviews, and strong leadership collects and considers the views and knowledge of the research team. Early engagement of partners who are not immediately involved but who will be involved later to move the project forward.		



<p>A.5 How feasible are the project objectives in the timeframe and with the resources available? Is there sufficient focus and are the goals easily quantifiable?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please explain in the comment box.		
	Weak	The project has vague goals. The workplan and/or budget are/is vague. The project is promising more than it can deliver; it is hard to imagine how the project will implement the plan or what success with look like.		
	Under-developed	The project is somewhat over-extended. Certain areas, like training or M&E for example, seem to be underfunded and/or the project has a certain lack of focus. Some of the necessary resources such as seed and other inputs aren't planned for.		
	Good	The project has reasonable expectations. Some small adjustments might have to be made. There is clear focus and well developed plan. Most of the resources are budgeted and planned for. The project may not be prepared for emergent issues.		
	Excellent	Steady progress to clear goals. Budget reflects both known costs and general planning categories to cover emerging needs. Project is well prepared for unanticipated challenges or issues.		
<p>A.6 How well are the project's strategies aligned with its research questions/objectives and other important documents?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please provide comments in box.		
	Weak	The theory of change does not align with the project's research questions or objectives. <i>OR</i> Research questions or objectives do not exist.		
	Under-developed	The theory of change is somewhat aligned with the research questions or objectives; the key concepts in the theory of change are articulated, but not especially clear. The connections between the theory of change and the project workplan are reasonable but vague. Research questions exist but do not cover all of the activities and/or are not well connected to the project objectives.		
	Good	The theory of change is aligned with the research questions or objectives. The key concepts in the theory of change are fairly clear and convincing. The theory of change is connected to the planning documents. The research questions are good and capture most of the activities and show an obvious connection to the project objectives.		
	Excellent	The theory of change is well aligned with the research questions or objectives. The key concepts in the theory of change are well articulated and are very clear and convincing. The theory of change is connected to the planning documents. Research questions are broken down into components that can be addressed with individual (but linked) studies. As a group the research questions demonstrate how they address the project objectives.		



<p>A.7 How well is gender considered and incorporated in to the project design?</p>	Not Applicable	No information available. Please provide comments in box.		
	Weak	There is no indication that gender is a consideration in the project. There is insufficient attention to gender in the research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings. The research might therefore reinforce previous or existing gender based discriminations, without any new insights into the gender aspects of social or technological change.		
	Under-developed	Gender is a consideration in the research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings. However, more could be done to understand the gender aspects of social or technological change.		
	Good	Gender is considered across all aspects of the research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings. Some issues related to the gender aspects of social or technological change might, however, need further examination.		
	Excellent	Gender is considered with great sensitivity across all aspects of the research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings. It has brought or has potential to bring significant new, highly credible insights that can be used to address gender discrimination, and/or facilitate social or technological change.		
<p>A.8 How well does the project work with farmers or organization(s) that work directly with farmers?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available.		
	Weak	Top-down technology transfer relationship with farmers.		
	Under-developed	The project talks about collaboration and participatory methods, but the practice needs to be improved.		
	Good	Using participatory processes with partner organizations and/or farmers. Diversity of farmers (gender, farm size, wealth, etc.) is attended to fairly well.		
	Excellent	Diverse farmers are well represented. The project uses participatory processes to design, implement, and analyze research. Participants' opinions and perceptions are sought, documented, and considered. The project, or some aspects of the project, are co-created with farmers.		



B. Research Design				
B.1 How appropriate is the overall research design?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please provide information in box.		
	Weak	The research design does not match the nature of the research question or the understanding of the problem(s). There is little or no justification in regards to the research design. Trade-offs are not considered. The credibility of evidence is not seriously considered. Stakeholder participation is not addressed.		
	Under-developed	The primary components of the research are designed with reasonable justification; however, the justification is not well articulated or completely understood by the research team. Trade-offs are not seriously considered. The evidence is likely to be credible, but there are some problematic areas in the design. Stakeholder participation is not well described.		
	Good	Most components offer a sound justification. Obvious trade-offs are considered. The credibility of evidence is likely to be moderate to high. Stakeholder participation is described.		
	Excellent	For all research components (social and biophysical): Decisions on the choice of study methods (e.g. experimental vs. observational studies) are justified. All data to be collected (qualitative and quantitative) is linked to research questions and/or evaluation questions. Trade-offs on design decisions are clearly articulated. The project explains the nature and extent of stakeholder participation and makes sure it is appropriate for producing relevant and credible results.		
B.2 How appropriate is the sampling design?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. <i>OR</i> No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	No description of the sample of the population under study. <i>OR</i> No rationale for the sample.		
	Under-developed	Some description of how the sample is chosen, but only limited information on total population and how the sub sample fits into the larger population. The 'domains of inference' are vague.		
	Good	For most components of the research the 'domains of inference' are clearly identified. The sampling strategies are clear but the justification is not always well understood.		
	Excellent	For all components of research (social and biophysical) clear 'domains of inference' have been defined and addressed. Sampling strategies – whether a census, purposeful, stratified, or random sample – have been justified.		



B.3 To what extent are protocols for all research activities developed and shared with the project team for input/feedback before activity starts?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please describe in comment box.		
	Weak	No protocols exist or they have not been shared with all of the relevant project partners. OR protocols exist but don't have enough detail and do not align with the plans for analysis.		
	Under-developed	Protocols exist for primary research activities and have been shared with some key individuals. Protocols may need some work.		
	Good	Protocols exist for almost all research activities. They connect to the analysis plan. They have been circulated among all partners.		
	Excellent	Robust protocols for all research and evaluation questions/ objectives are in place before research starts and are the product of collaborative design. They contain pertinent literature reviews, justifications of methodological choices, and describe how data will be gathered, stored, analyzed, interpreted and disseminated. Protocols and indicators are shared with other groups.		
B.4 How well is data managed?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	Data is not secure in a centralized location and is hard for project partners to access it.		
	Under-developed	Data is available but not well organized or there is not a specific data management plan.		
	Good	Data is available and secure but not centralized.		
	Excellent	An explicit plan for storing data and documents from the project is in place. The data is secure and centralized. Explicit quality management procedures are designed for all stages of data collection, analysis and reporting. Data is made publically available where appropriate.		
B.5 How well have the ethical issues of research been handled according to national and international norms and laws?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	No prior informed consent. The relevant authorities have not approved the research. Research results have not been shared with stakeholders. Local priorities have not been considered.		
	Under-developed	Prior informed consent is obtained for only main research components. The relevant authorities sometimes formally approve the research. Research results are shared with very limited group of stakeholders. Local priorities are partially considered. Confidentiality of personal data assured.		
	Good	Prior informed consent is obtained. The project mostly seeks buy-in from relevant authorities. Research results and information are mostly returned to relevant stakeholders.		



	Excellent	Prior informed consent is obtained. Relevant authorities approve all research. The cost and benefit to the study participants has been considered. Research results have been returned to stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner.		
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C. Implementation				
C.1 How well has the research been implemented as planned, and/or adapted as indicated?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	Plans (workplans, protocols etc.) are not followed and adaptations have not been made as needed, or have not been documented.		
	Under-developed	The plans have been loosely followed. Modifications have been made where obviously needed, but there has not been an iterative review of data and results to inform ongoing planning.		
	Good	Plans are followed and modifications occur; modifications don't always occur at all of the necessary levels or activities of the project.		
	Excellent	Plans are followed and modified based on iterative analysis of data and input from project team and stakeholders. Plans are always reflected at the necessary levels or activities of the project. For example, protocols are adapted when necessary. Data management plans are modified as necessary. Barriers to protocol implementation are well documented and discussed. Project adaptations are documented and include clear reasons for adaptations.		
C.2 How well is data analyzed?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	The project has not even looked at the data. OR the project's data is messy and the results do not seem to make sense. OR the data analyses completed were inappropriate to the research and evaluation questions. OR statistical analyses were implemented incorrectly.		
	Under-developed	Data analysis strategies are semi-appropriate. However, analysis is limited and incomplete. Data analysis does not occur as regularly or frequently as would be ideal. Research and evaluation questions have been addressed superficially. The inferences made by the project are incomplete.		
	Good	Data analysis strategies are statistically appropriate and are relevant to the research and evaluation questions. The data is mostly analyzed. The analysis of data happens in a timely and regular fashion. The project is able to make reasoned inferences. The project has a reasonable grasp on its assumptions or holes in the interpretation of the analysis.		
	Excellent	Data is analyzed regularly/frequently throughout the project. The analysis methods are robust and complete. Tradeoffs with analysis techniques are fully considered. The project's inferences are reasoned. Any jumps in logic, assumptions, or holes in the interpretation are clearly articulated.		



D. Interpretation				
D.1 How do projects use data results (including unanticipated results) to understand the research questions and to build new knowledge?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	The data does not support the conclusions. No connection of results to a broader research base. Data is not used to inform project implementation or design adaptations.		
	Under-developed	The conclusions are somewhat supported by the data analysis. Limited connection to a broader research base. Broad implications of the data are recognized, but nuances not well understood or explored.		
	Good	The conclusions are mostly supported by the data and makes reasonable connections to a broader research base. Some nuances in interpretation are explored.		
	Excellent	The conclusions are justified by the data. Data analysis is complete and comprehensive and connected to a broader research or evidence base. Nuances in the interpretation are used to develop the next research steps.		
D.2 How well are project findings documented through reports or publications?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	No external documentation of work. There has been no peer review from qualified experts		
	Under-developed	Manuscripts and reports are developed but of low quality and not sufficiently shared with target audiences. There has been minimal peer review.		
	Good	Coherent and strong manuscripts and reports have been published as grey literature OR peer reviewed journal articles OR presented at important conferences. Important aspects or synthesis of the project have not been communicated to target audiences. Sufficient peer review.		
	Excellent	Manuscripts, reports, or journal articles have been published. Significant research findings are communicated to strategic and relevant stakeholders in accessible formats.		



E. Institutional Strengthening				
E.1 How well does the project contribute to strengthening and influencing respective partner institutions, or other relevant institutions/organizations in a way that is likely to continue after the project ends?	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	Partner institutions seem oblivious to project activities, ideas, and objectives. Institutional practices and/or policies undermine the project. There is no interest in learning from the project.		
	Under-developed	There is some awareness of the project's activities, ideas and objectives by organizational leadership, which might affect the organization over time. Most of the training benefits from CCRP stay with their field staff who will probably move onto new organizations at some point.		
	Good	Partner institutions are open to the learning and adapting of successful and useful activities, ideas, and objectives that are used by the project. The training benefits from the CCRP reach beyond the project's immediate staff. There is mutual respect and support between the project and the institution.		
	Excellent	Partner institutions view the project as a vital source of learning of successful and innovative ideas. Partner institutions have changed their policies and practices due to influence and interventions of the project. The training benefits from the CCRP have a wide impact with other staff from partner institutions.		



F. Research Utilization				
<p>F.1 How well are research results informing development and policy interventions? OR... To what extent is the evidence or research products produced by the project used in development interventions?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. (Please explain in comment box.)		
	Weak	Research results are not shared with development and policy related stakeholders within the project or outside the project. OR the project results that are shared with stakeholders are questionable and may lead to negative outcomes.		
	Under-developed	A few attempts have been made to share research results with development and policy related stakeholders. There is minimal follow-through or effort placed on this activity. OR Minimal efforts are made to use research results to improve development and policy interventions within the project.		
	Good	Most research results are being shared with development and policy stakeholders. There has been some use of project research results from development and policy stakeholders. OR The team uses some of its results to improve its development policy interventions in the project.		
	Excellent	The research results are being shared with development and policy stakeholders. The project is using creative and successful strategies for sharing their results. Development and/or policy actors are inspired to change practice or policies based on research results. OR the project uses its research results to improve its development or policy interventions within the project.		
<p>F.2 How well does the project measure the impacts of its intervention in terms of livelihood and/or nutrition of the target population?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. (Please explain in comment box.)		
	Weak	The project does not measure any type of impact in any way. There might be evaluation questions that are not being addressed OR there might be some ad hoc measurement that is not grounded in a systematic evaluation plan.		
	Under-developed	The project has evaluation questions and an evaluation plan, but measurement is not rigorous and systematic. The project M&E touches on development outcomes, but focuses primarily on research outputs. Little examination of outputs in relationship to impact.		
	Good	The project is examining indicators of impact appropriately given the lifecycle of the project.		
	Excellent	Plan in place to assess use and impact among farmers. Have shown credible evidence related to impact.		
<p>F.3 How well is farmer and community heterogeneity recognized when communicating results?</p>	Not Applicable	Not applicable to the research project or phase. OR No information available. Please explain in comment box.		
	Weak	The project makes recommendations to fit all farmers and communities without considering the diversity of farmers and communities.		
	Under-developed	The project makes various options available but doesn't consider the contexts very well.		
	Good	The project communicates which options are best suited to the biophysical contexts.		
	Excellent	The project communicates which options are best suited to the biophysical and social contexts, while attending to the various trade-offs that farmer's experience. Farmers and development organizations are supported to adapt options based on their contexts.		