

In a presentation at the Environmental Evaluators Network, Eleanor Chelimsky discussed a checklist used by the General Accountability Office during her tenure while planning evaluations. The checklist below was generated from that presentation (Chelimsky, 2010).

Pre-Evaluation Checklist

A review of the history of the field

- the evolution of the subject being addressed by the evaluation
- the history of prior interventions for dealing with it
- the theories underlying those interventions, along with their controversies
- past and current scientific or technological applications in the area
- the development over time of the federal/state/local partnership for addressing the issue
- the status of current thinking about the subject

A review of the present-day political environment for the evaluation

- the known legislative, executive and judicial branch positions in the subject area
- the general political climate
- the stances of the political parties regarding the specific subject being evaluated
- public opinion regarding both the subject area and the intervention proposed to address it, as well as current economic, social, or cultural trends likely to affect public support
- views expressed by populations of particular interest to the evaluation

An examination of specific evaluation question posed

- Whether the question was bona fide
- For what purpose the answer was needed
- Whether the question was sufficiently specific and objective for an evaluation to be performed that could satisfactorily answer it
- Whether obvious obstacles stood in the way of legislative or executive branch use

An analysis of subject-area peripheries

- explicit or implicit interactions between the subject area and other related systems or fields of knowledge, especially conflicts in policies across two areas
- whether those interactions were important to the proposed evaluation
- whether they were defined (or undefined) by bureaucratic boundaries

- whether there were potential data sets stemming from those interactions
- related areas of expertise
- overlap of subject and function among levels of government

A review of the lessons and experience of past evaluative work in the field

- what was the evaluation question and what overall design was used
- what comparisons were made, and what data were collected
- what program challenges had to be overcome
- what were the major strengths the weaknesses of the methodology, and what efforts were made to compensate for the weaknesses
- what findings were produced, what controversy was experienced, and what use, if any, was made of the findings

Chelimsky, E. (2010, June). *Navigating evaluative complexity in the age of Obama*. Paper presented at the Environmental Evaluators Network, Washington, DC.
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<http://www.nfwf.org/Content/NavigationMenu/GrantPrograms/Evaluation/default.htm>