

# Sample criteria to select case studies for evaluation

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Time and budget constraints often mean that organisations are unable to evaluate all of their programmes, and large programmes, operating in multiple locations, are unable to evaluate all project sites. This tool introduces two sets of criteria to support evaluators and programme managers to select case studies or programmes for evaluation: i) information about how relevant or feasible evaluation is for individual programmes, and ii) across the overall portfolio, strategic thinking around what types of cases are most important to understand. This tool was developed by Anne Buffardi, Irene Guijt, Simon Hearn and Tiina Pasanen for use in [The Methods Lab](#) projects.

## Criteria

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### 1. Feasibility and utility of an evaluation for individual programmes or sites

- Is there clarity of evaluation audience and purpose?
- What is the level of interest in evaluation and learning among implementation staff, donors, government, intended beneficiaries? Are there internal champions?
- What is the alignment with regional and thematic priority areas?
- Is it a topic of long-term interest?
- What is the relevance to other current and future projects?
- What is the availability and quality of existing information? What are potential evaluability challenges?
- What is the available timeframe?

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### 2. Across the portfolio, what type of case(s) is most important to understand?

First, identify the ways in which the programmes or sites vary:

- Budget size
- Sector
- Duration of the intervention
- Phase in the implementation cycle (ongoing, recently ended, years since completion)
- Funding source
- Participant profiles (age, ethnicity, religion)
- Context (economic, political, geographic, cultural)
- Intervention type (training, delivery of goods or services, advocacy)
- Intended or observed outcomes (agricultural yield, employment status, legislative change)

Next, determine what type of case(s) is it most important to understand: <sup>1</sup>

- **Typical case:** one or more cases with characteristics that are most common across the portfolio of programmes or sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerring, J. and Seawright, J. (2007) 'Techniques for choosing cases' in Gerring, J (ed) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 86-150.

- **Diverse case:** two or more cases that illustrate the range of variation in one or more characteristics, can be representative of specific factors in the overall portfolio.
- **Extreme case:** one or more cases that exemplify an extreme or unusual manifestation of a characteristic or the outcome; for example, one or more cases with dramatic or very little change.
- **Deviant case:** one or more cases that diverge from the portfolio in unexpected ways; a deviant case aims to better understand and develop a new model of how change takes place.
- **Influential case:** one or more case with an influential configuration of factors that contribute to the outcome; an influential case aims to confirm the overall theory of change.
- **Crucial case:** one or more cases that are most or least likely to result in the expected outcome.
- **Pathway case:** one or more cases where one factor but not another factor is likely to have caused the observed outcome.
- **Most similar cases:** two or more cases with similar characteristics except one and that had different outcomes
- **Most different cases:** two or more cases with different characteristics except one and that had similar outcomes.