Leading an Objective

Just-in-Time Job Aids

Engagement staff members are frequently asked to “lead” an objective. However, what exactly does that mean? This document describes typical roles and responsibilities associated with leading an objective. If you are assigned to lead an objective, this job aid can remind you of the many tasks you will likely need to undertake. Outlined below are tasks that apply throughout the engagement followed by instructions for each engagement phase. Consult with your AIC regarding how these apply to your engagement.

Throughout the engagement:

- Track and communicate progress on your objective. Develop and regularly update a document that reflects progress and upcoming tasks. This should include: interviews to conduct, documentation to collect, criteria to identify, analyses to conduct, and other follow up. Some of this may be included in the planning document used for team meetings. Because some activities, such as interviews, may overlap across objectives, coordinate with your team to determine how best to track shared responsibilities.
- Develop interview questions for your objective. Tailor as needed.
- Conduct background research on your objective, save relevant documents to DM, and read key documents. If time allows, it can also be helpful to create summaries of the most relevant documents. Check in with your AIC to be sure you are on the same page about what is relevant and what may be out of scope.
- Communicate key information about your objectives at internal and external meetings, or under some circumstances, prepare other team members to do so.
- Frequently review what you have learned for your objective and what information you may still need to collect.
- Document key decisions on scope and methodology for your objective.

Planning and Proposed Design:

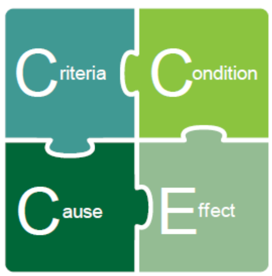
At the beginning of this phase, it may not yet be clear what the team’s objectives will be or which objectives various team members will be assigned. If you are assigned an objective, here are some tasks you should focus on:

- Begin planning your objective. This includes identifying 1) key sub questions that need to be answered to address your objective, 2) documentation and data that should be collected, 3) approaches to analysis and a plan for documenting the analysis, and 4) organizations and, if possible, individuals to meet with. This information should be documented in DM, refined as the engagement progresses, and will become clearer and in some cases more specific as you get closer to proposed design.
- Develop your row of the design matrix. This is sometimes done in collaboration with the team and will likely require iterative input from your AIC.

Evidence Gathering, Finalizing Design, and Analysis:

By this phase, you should know which objective you are responsible for and have a solid understanding of what needs to be done to collect and analyze the information needed to support that objective.

- As design confirmation approaches, scrutinize your section of the design matrix and consider whether, given what you have learned since proposed design, any changes to the objective's wording, sub questions, or scope, and methodology are warranted. Consider whether the planned work will answer your researchable objective and whether remaining audit work can be completed within planned timelines. Consider:
    - What are your main findings?
    - Do you have sufficient information to support the four elements of a finding (criteria, condition, cause, and effect)?

    - What information needs to be corroborated and by whom? How should this be done, i.e., through interviews or email follow-up?
    - Will specific pieces of information need to be updated later in the job? For example, status of agency efforts, or, shortcomings previously identified.
    - What are the highest risk items in the work remaining, and how should you prioritize resolving them? For example, if you identify the need to do an analysis that synthesizes multiple sources, consider the work associated with developing it, including supervisory reviews and any tracing and verifying.
- To inform message development, document observations about what has been learned to date on your objective. The idea is not to note everything that has been learned, but instead what may be important to the message. It can be helpful to share this with your AIC and team so that they can add to it.
- In consultation with your team, decide how you will develop the message for your objective. This can be done through writing on walls or sharing and revising the document you created (see above), or you may use other approaches.
- Continue to synthesize and organize the message in your working outline for your objective for message agreement. Note any placeholders for information you don't yet have. Ideally, know (and note) your plan for collecting this information. Identify any graphics or tables you think will be useful.

- Work with stakeholders, as appropriate, in planning the methodology for your objective. For example, if using data, be sure to identify who will be responsible for acquiring the data, how long it will take, and contingencies if there are delays or the data are not available, as well as who will be responsible for planning and conducting the analysis and data reliability assessment.
- Be aware of past GAO work in the area and meet as needed with analysts responsible for prior work.

Product Development:

In this phase, the focus is largely on fleshing out and supporting the message that the team and leadership just agreed on. You should know the bottom line for your objective, collect and analyze any remaining information to support your findings, and ensure that your findings are clear and logically supported. It is important to be flexible in this phase—sometimes two objectives get combined and occasionally an objective is eliminated for various reasons.

- Write the section for your objective. If the message agreement document is written well, it should be possible to just use it as your starting point and then elaborate and support with details.
- Write the sections for your objective that appear in other sections of the report, i.e. the OSM and/or mini-OSM and the highlights page paragraph.
- Complete any Records of Analysis (ROAs) that are outstanding for your section. Determine whether any details from your section need to be emphasized for confirmation at the exit or via other means
- Work with the team's graphics designer to develop graphics and figures for your section. (Note: start this earlier in the engagement process if you already have an idea of what these might be.)
- Revise, revise, revise—in collaboration with the team's CA, the AIC, and possibly others.
- Address comments specific to your objective.
- Index your section. Address referencing points for your section.

In addition, you may be responsible for many additional tasks that may not be specific to one objective, such as planning, leading, and writing up interviews; preparing other engagement documentation; and coordinating with stakeholders.