CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Mid-Term Evaluation of COL’s Strategic Plan 2021-2027

Proposal due:
1 December 2023 (PDT)
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Introduction

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technologies. Committed to enabling member states, especially smaller states and developing countries, to enhance their educational and training capacities, COL works with a vision of empowering people through learning that leads to economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental conservation. COL works with governments, institutions, and NGOs as well as community-based organisations and networks to implement its six-year Strategic Plan 2021-2027.

COL's approach to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is integral to its strategic framework, ensuring that its programmes are aligned with the needs and priorities of member states and are effective in achieving sustainable outcomes. As we reach the midpoint of our Strategic Plan 2021-2027, COL seeks to conduct a thorough and reflective evaluation of our work. This mid-term evaluation will serve as a critical checkpoint to assess our progress, identify areas for improvement, and reinforce our commitment to the values of equity, access, inclusion and quality in education and training.

The objectives of this mid-term evaluation are multifaceted, aiming to scrutinise the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and outcomes of our initiatives, with a particular focus on open, distance, and technology-enabled learning (TEL), in formal as well as non-formal settings. We are dedicated to fostering innovation, influencing policy, building capacity, mainstreaming gender, and ensuring the robustness of our M&E practices.

In pursuit of these objectives, COL invites evaluation experts to review our strategic documents, develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation plan, and provide an analytical report that will guide our efforts moving forward. This document sets forth the terms of reference for the mid-term evaluation, detailing the Consultant’s tasks, deliverables, timeline, and reporting requirements.

COL seeks professional(s) who share our commitment to excellence in inclusive and effective open, distance and technology-enabled learning. The evaluator’s expertise will contribute to shaping the next phase of COL’s activities and refining their alignment with needs and priorities of member states.

Objectives of the Mid-Term Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation will provide a comprehensive analysis of the progress made by COL in achieving the strategic objectives laid out in the plan and offer recommendations for any course corrections needed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Strategic Plan for the remaining period. The evaluation will have the following objectives:

Effectiveness: Evaluate how effectively the Strategic Plan has been implemented to date, particularly in terms of achieving the anticipated outputs and outcomes for the two sectors, education and skills.
**Efficiency:** Assess the efficiency of the strategies and processes put in place by COL in utilising resources to achieve the desired outcomes. This entails evaluating the value for money of the *approaches* employed in implementing the Strategic Plan.

**Sustainability:** Evaluate the sustainability of the initiatives under the Strategic Plan, considering whether the benefits are likely to continue after the current plan period. This includes looking at the potential for the institutionalisation of practices in sustaining the changes brought about by COL's interventions.

**Policy Influence:** Assess COL's role in influencing national policy developments and implementation in the realm of open and distance learning and technology-enabled learning.

**Capacity Building:** Determine the effectiveness of COL's efforts in building the capacity and capability of institutions and individuals in formal, non-formal, and informal learning environments.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** Evaluate the integration of gender mainstreaming strategies in all activities and specific measures taken to eliminate or prevent gender inequalities.

**Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Assess the robustness of the M&E framework and the extent to which it has been implemented to track progress and inform decision-making processes.

**Innovation:** Review the extent to which COL has invested in and promoted innovations in open, distance and TEL to increase access to quality lifelong learning opportunities.

## Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Mid-Term Evaluation

This section specifies the terms of reference for the Consultant appointed to perform the mid-term evaluation, as specified in the Strategic Plan 2021-2027. The evaluation aims to measure the progress made towards the outputs and targets set for various activities and to deliver a detailed analysis of the programme's effectiveness.

The evaluation will be informed by:

- Strategic planning documents.
- Data from the Corporate and Initiative Logframes.
- Evaluation reports for ten Initiatives that comprise the Education and Skills sectors.
- Two additional reports from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), covering each sector respectively.

Note: CEMCA is recognised as an Initiative within the Strategic Plan 2021-2027.

All processes in the evaluation, including discussions, will be carried out virtually without the necessity for travel.

To achieve the objectives of the mid-term evaluation, the Consultant is expected to perform the following tasks and actions:
Document Review and Understanding

- Read and comprehend COL's Strategic Plan 2021-2027 (the Strategic Plan) along with the measurement framework and the corporate annual implementation plans for the first three years to fully grasp COL's approach to M&E.
- Review Annual Achievement Reports, and the Corporate and Initiative Logframes.

Evaluation Planning

- Prepare an evaluation plan with a set of key evaluation questions, detailing the activities related to the verification process with a focus on quality and completeness of the data sources.
- Develop a data collection verification strategy and appropriate tools for data collection, as may be needed.

Assessment and Analysis

- Address additional questions for an overall assessment of the achievement of the targets of various initiatives and address the objectives of the mid-term evaluation.
- Review and analyse the reports of Initiative level evaluations, policy documents, and institutional baseline reports, as well as available reports of the Directors of sectors that summarise the Initiative-level evaluation reports.
- Analyse available data collected by COL, including the internal logframe data.
- Consolidate Initiative and sector-level reports and draw out key findings.
- Offer an analysis of the viability of the M&E framework and identify parameters in the measurement framework that can be refined or merged with compatible others, including any recommendations for changes in the indicators used for outputs, short- and long-term outcomes and impacts.
- Outline constructive recommendations to improve areas of weakness and leverage strengths in the Initiatives over the next three years.

Data Collection and Verification

- Undertake any additional data collection/verification using questionnaires, interviews (mainly using online tools), and document review.
- Triangulate findings and seek clarification on information presented in the evaluation reports through communications with COL partners and staff as necessary.

Development and delivery of reports

- Prepare a 40-50-page draft report in Word format which includes details from the activities mentioned above.
- Hold meetings with the President and members of Senior Management of COL to discuss preliminary findings and clarify any specific questions or concerns.
- Present a summary of preliminary findings and recommendations to COL Senior Management and Education Specialists and Advisers.
- Integrate findings from discussions with senior management and Education Specialists and Advisers into the report.
- Prepare and submit an analytical report to COL, addressing the objectives of the mid-term evaluation, incorporating all findings and insights from the evaluation process.
Deliverables
The Consultant is expected to deliver:

- A plan of evaluation including the proposed set of tools and instruments.
- A draft report and a final comprehensive analytical report.
- Regular updates to COL on the status of the evaluation activities.

Timeline
The selection process for the Consultant is anticipated to conclude by mid-December 2023. Upon selection, the Consultant will commence the evaluation on 8 January 2024. The submission of the evaluation plan is scheduled for 31 January 2024. The Consultant is then expected to deliver a draft report by 15 April 2024, followed by the final analytical report, which is to be submitted to COL no later than 30 April 2024.

Reporting
The Consultant shall submit the report of the evaluation findings to the Vice President, who chairs the sub-committee of the Senior Management team responsible for coordinating the mid-term evaluation. The President of COL will engage directly with the evaluator as needed. Additionally, the Consultant is expected to provide regular updates to the committee, detailing the progress of the evaluation and reporting any challenges encountered throughout the process.

Confidentiality
The Consultant is required to adhere to COL's established data protection and safeguarding policies available at www.col.org. The Consultant commits to preserving the confidentiality and integrity of all information acquired throughout the evaluation process.

Criteria for Selection
The process of selection will be premised on at least three factors: (1) established competence in M&E of multi-country projects with evidence of successful prior engagement in similar projects; (2) value for money as evident in costs quoted; and (3) experience in working with developing countries in the Commonwealth.

The attributes (knowledge, skills, experience) required of the evaluator include evidence of competencies in:

- Evaluation - demonstration of strong evaluation expertise and experience in a developing country context, including in education and training.
- Gender and inclusive development.
- Cost-benefit analysis or a comparable method that can adequately assess Value for Money (VfM).
- Technology-Enabled Learning.
- Strategic thinking ability, research, analysis and report writing skills, demonstrated ability to translate and present complex data simply for a broad ranging audience.
- Experience in preparing and presenting an Evaluation Report in a manner that increases the likelihood that they will be used and accepted by a diverse group of stakeholders.
Submission of proposals

Interested applicants who are individuals/entities based in a Commonwealth country are eligible to submit proposals. Proposals must include the following documents:

1. Capability and technical experience statement, highlighting previous experience and expertise in areas listed in the section on selection criteria.
2. Financial proposal in Canadian Dollars.
3. CV of the lead evaluator and team members, if any, with citizenship clearly indicated.

All proposals must be received by 17:00 hours Pacific Standard Time (Vancouver) on or before Friday, 1 December 2023.

Proposals (including any attachments) must be sent in a single email to: opportunities@col.org by the due date above with the subject line ‘Mid-term evaluation’.