

## Impact Assessment Follow-up

## PURPOSE

These international best practice principles for impact assessment (IA) follow-up are intended to guide development and capacity building amongst practitioners for improving IA outcomes, thereby enhancing sustainable development.

## BACKGROUND

These principles are an update of the 2007 IAIA IA Follow-up principles document. They were developed through literature review and presented and discussed in collaborative sessions at IAIA conferences between 2018 and 2022.

## HOW TO CITE THIS PUBLICATION

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### Definition

Impact assessment (IA) follow-up is defined as:

*Understanding the outcomes of projects or plans subject to impact assessment.*

## Objective

The primary objective of IA follow-up is to determine and learn about the outcomes of impact assessment of projects or plans in order to inform ongoing management of that development. Secondary objectives (beyond the scope of these principles) are: to learn about IA performance, and to enhance efficacy and legitimacy of decision-making and impact assessment for projects or plans, including future IA applications for other development.

## What is IA follow-up?

Follow-up is a fundamental component of IA and essential if outcomes of a plan or project subject to IA are to be known. Thus, a commitment to follow-up should be present for every IA whether this is through inclusion in legislative provisions for IA or within individual approval decisions. This includes appropriate resourcing for all IA follow-up undertakings throughout the life-cycle of development. IA follow-up comprises five key elements:

- **Monitoring** – collection of activity and environmental data relevant to project or plan performance determination.
- **Evaluation** – of monitoring data in light of performance standards, objectives, predictions or expectations.
- **Management** – making decisions and taking appropriate actions in response to issues arising from monitoring and evaluation activities.
- **Engagement and communication** – with stakeholders on all aspects of IA follow-up.
- **Governance** – processes and arrangements enabling the implementation of IA follow-up activities.

# Impact assessment follow-up principles

IA follow-up should be guided by these 15 best practice principles.

**1. State the objective of each impact assessment follow-up activity and the overall program.**

IA follow-up should be objectives-led and goal oriented.

**2. Be tailored to context.**

IA follow-up should be 'fit-for-purpose' recognising that individual applications of IA follow-up will vary according to the specific contextual factors at play (e.g., project or plan type or locality, significance of impacts or issues arising, or institutional setting).

**3. Commence early in the impact assessment process.**

Timing is vital in IA follow-up and developing a follow-up program should start early in the IA process (e.g., during screening and scoping) and thereafter be acted upon as appropriate.

**4. Be carried out throughout the project or plan life-cycle.**

IA follow-up should be carried out on an iterative and ongoing basis. IA follow-up provisions should be established by the time that projects or plans are approved. Implementation of follow-up actions should commence and continue through the construction, operation, and, where relevant, the decommissioning phases of development.

**5. Be transparent.**

All IA follow-up arrangements (e.g., design, processes and governance) and implementation actions and their outcomes (monitoring, evaluation, management and engagement with stakeholders) should be publicly disclosed. All stakeholders have a right to feedback on the IA process.

**6. Be accessible to all impact assessment stakeholders.**

IA follow-up information should be easy to access and to understand. Archiving, retrieval and disclosure of follow-up information requires careful attention. As a minimum, stakeholders should be informed about IA follow-up activities and outcomes, and to be provided with opportunities to give input or feedback; but active engagement in follow-up program design and implementation is desirable.

**7. Provide clear accountability for impact assessment follow-up responsibilities.**

Ensure that there is clear accountability established in the governance arrangements for IA follow-up. Enabling a two-way flow of communication between stakeholders who are affected and those responsible for IA follow-up and/or the development is important.

**8. Provide clear, pre-defined and well-justified performance criteria.**

Follow-up actions should produce useful information and outcomes which can be easily measured, and unambiguously ap-

praised against clear and pre-defined performance criteria. The performance criteria should be rigorous and reflect best practice (e.g., through adopting well-defined methodologies or approaches to monitoring, evaluation, management, communication and engagement).

**9. Specify enforcement provisions.**

In addition to promoting 'good behaviour', it is also important to identify the consequences for non-compliance within IA follow-up provisions.

**10. Promote continuous learning from experience to improve future practice.**

IA follow-up should enable learning from experience through active feedback. It should not be static. Such learning may inform the management of other similar projects or plans regardless of whether they are operated by the same or other proponents, to improve IA practice.

**11. Facilitate adaptive management.**

Mitigation provisions for a project or plan should be adjustable as needed. Learning derived from IA follow-up should inform ongoing adaptive management of the project or plan as necessary, in order to achieve its objectives. IA follow-up would ideally also enable unexpected consequences to be revealed and addressed as appropriate, as part of an effective adaptive management approach.

**12. Be flexible according to emerging needs.**

Governance arrangements for IA follow-up, and the IA follow-up program itself, should be adjusted as necessary to emerging needs (e.g., arising from environmental changes, evolving needs of stakeholders, or changes in the regulatory framework).

**13. Inform and be informed by follow-up for other relevant activities at different levels of decision-making.**

IA follow-up should facilitate the transfer of information between different levels of IA application – tiering the various strategic and operational planning stages of policies, plans, programs and projects.

**14. Address cumulative effects.**

IA follow-up activity should account for the environmental impacts from all stressors in a regional environment, not solely those of the project or plan under evaluation.

**15. Consider the overall effects of the project or plan.**

IA follow-up should provide a holistic perspective of the project or plan outcomes, taking into account how each of the individual effects of a project or plan interact with each other to contribute to sustainable development.

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