

The 2015 aid stakeholder survey

The aid stakeholder survey is a tool designed to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of Australia and New Zealand's aid programs and provide suggestions for their improvement. The survey (specifically tailored to each aid program) will target NGOs and development contractors that are familiar with and involved in the delivery of Australian and New Zealand aid. It will also be made publicly available online for other interested aid stakeholders to complete. The survey will run over three months from mid-2015, with the results to be launched at the end of the year.

Researchers

This research will be run under the supervision of Devpolicy Research Fellow [Terence Wood](#). Research Officer [Jonathan Pryke](#) will lead the Australian component of the survey. Research Officer [Camilla Burkot](#) will lead the New Zealand component of the survey. Devpolicy Director Stephen Howes will also act as an advisor on the project.

Key dates:

June 2015: Survey goes live

August 2015: Survey closed

November/December 2015: Report launched

Background

One legitimate criticism that can be made of aid is that it has a weak or broken performance feedback loop. This is characterised by a sharp insider-outsider distinction. Aid insiders, those employed on the aid dollar, are very knowledgeable, but tend to keep quiet about problems. Aid outsiders, even if interested, lack the information base needed to reach sound judgements and offer good advice. The aid stakeholder survey provides a voice to the aid insiders, allowing them to express their insights into the effectiveness of their respective aid program without fear of repercussion. This will help strengthen the performance feedback loop by documenting how the aid program is performing in the eyes of those that know it best.

In 2013 the Development Policy Centre ran the first Australian aid stakeholder survey. This was a new instrument we trialled (new for Australia and as far as we are aware internationally) to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of the Australian aid program, and suggestions for improvement. It's essentially a type of crowd-sourcing, where the crowd in this case are stakeholders in the Australian aid program. We also send the survey to the entire population of development contractors and development NGOs who receive meaningful funding from their aid programs, as well as a sampling of smaller development NGOs that do not. We thought that collating the views of the sector in a systematic way would be a worthwhile and constructive exercise. You can read a blog detailing the rationale behind the survey and the methods used [here](#).

The survey covered views on: aid volumes, the functioning of the aid program in general and that part of aid program with which the respondent is engaged. The full

questionnaire is available [here](#). It was conducted online under a guarantee of anonymity and was run in two phases.

The **first phase** was launched on June 17th, and was a closed survey targeting pre-identified members of the development contractor and Australian NGO communities, who had been targeted because they are the only two sectors where we could hope to pre-identify the entire population. We targeted all major development contractors and Australian development NGOs which receive funding from the aid program and a sample of smaller NGOs. Participants were selected based on seniority in their organisation and amount of direct engagement with the Australian aid program.

The **second phase**, was launched on July 15th, and was a public survey in which all other interested stakeholders were requested to participate on a self-selection basis. The questionnaire was the same as in phase one.

The results were collected and analysed separately, differentiating between responses from the first phase, the pre-identified population, and the second phase, the self-selected population. Results were further differentiated by the sector where the respondent identified themselves as being from (i.e. contractor, NGO, academic, etc).

The results of the survey were released in December and are available on the Development Policy Centre [website](#). Respondents were asked about a range of attributes - 17 in all - which are known to influence aid effectiveness and support for aid. These attributes can be broken down into four categories: those needed to ensure a strong performance feedback loop, those required to manage the knowledge burden of aid, those that help limit excessive discretion in aid program decision making, and those that will build public support for aid.

Overall, the responses suggested room for improvement in aid program performance, with only six of the 17 attributes receiving a "pass mark" of at least three out of five. Some weaknesses stood out more than others. Lack of staff continuity in the former AusAID was a particular complaint. So was slow decision-making, micromanagement, risk aversion, and a fragmented aid program.

The 2015 survey

A lot has changed since the survey was first run two years ago. Since the 2013 elections major changes have occurred including the Australian aid program being fully integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, while at the same time major cuts to aid have been budgeted. These changes make it even more important to have an independent feedback mechanism to chronical their impact on the perceived effectiveness of Australia's aid by those who know the aid program best.

Much of the design and implementation of the 2015 survey will be the same as in 2013. The only major change this year will be the extension of the survey to New Zealand, which has experienced similar reforms to Australia in recent year. The 2015 survey will in effect be two – one tailored to the Australian context and another to New Zealand's. While the questions will be largely aligned between the two surveys, there will be some scope for changes between them due to the different contexts two aid programs.

The survey will again be distributed online in two phases – the first phase to the target groups discussed above and the second phase made publicly available online. Participants will be answering an online survey of close to 50, mainly multiple choice, questions on the Australian and New Zealand aid programs. The survey will take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Participants will engage in the stakeholder survey under a guarantee of anonymity.

We are aiming for as much continuity between the 2013 and 2015 Australian component of the survey. As many questions as possible will be retained to allow for analysis over time. Some questions will be removed and others added through consultation with key participating stakeholders. The merging of AusAID into DFAT, the Coalition aid cuts, and the Coalition's new 'aid paradigm' are all areas of consideration in this process.

Contacts

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