

IDRC guidelines for preparing Interim technical reports

Table of contents

Submission of interim technical reports	2
Using these guidelines	2
Format	3
Title page and table of contents	3
Synthesis	3
The research problem	3
Research findings	3
Project implementation and management	4
Project outputs and dissemination	4
Capacity-building	4
Impact	5
Recommendations	5

*This document is also available at: http://www.idrc.ca/admin/brochures/Int_tech_e.htm
http://www.idrc.ca/admin/Pdf/Int_tech_e.pdf*

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Submission of interim technical reports

During the implementation of projects supported by an IDRC grant, recipients are expected to submit a number of interim (or progress) reports, usually as a condition for receiving further grant advances (payments) from IDRC.

Interim technical reports have a definite project management bias since their primary objective is to satisfy IDRC of the progress of the work being supported. It is not excluded, however that certain projects produce and document final technical outputs as the project progresses.

The interim technical report explains what was achieved with the money and time spent on a project during a specific reporting period. The interim report specifically refers to the project management schedule and budgets that were set out at the beginning. The interim report represents the best opportunity to request and discuss changes or amendments to any aspect of the project.

It is very important that the IDRC officers responsible for the grant be able to determine the progress of the work so they can approve the release of further funds. For that reason, incomplete or unclear interim reports will be rejected. Thus, a list of scientific outputs of a project and scientific narratives can not be construed as a substitute for the interim report. See the “Guidelines for preparing final technical reports” to learn how to include the major scientific outputs of the project.

Depending on the size and complexity of a project, the interim reports may vary in length from two-to-three single-spaced pages, to up to 15 or 20. The interim report and accompanying documents should be submitted in electronic form. If not possible, two hard copies of the report should be sent by mail with a diskette containing the electronic file.*

* *Text can be prepared in Corel WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, or a text file. They are preferably sent by email to avoid damage in shipment. If diskettes are sent, they should be labelled appropriately with the words "Interim Technical Report," the IDRC grant number, the software program(s) used, the date, and the sender's name. Do not change the extension of the file and use the naming convention below for filename.*

*e.g. 104574 1st Interim Report Jan-Dec 2007.doc
102030-002 2nd Interim Report July-Dec 2004.wpd*

*In French:
104574 1er rapport etape Jan-Dec 2007.doc
102030-002 2ieme rapport etape Juil-Dec 2004.wpd*

*In Spanish :
104574 1ro informe interino Enero-Dec 2007.doc
102030-002 2do informe interino Jul-Dec 2004.wpd*

Recipients must complete and submit interim technical reports on or before their due dates, as stated in the grant agreement.

Using these guidelines

Although fairly structured guidelines are provided below, we suggest to project leaders that they begin by reflecting on the main messages they would like to convey in order to focus mainly on those messages. IDRC's principal interest in the reports can be summarized by the following questions:

- Is the project on track to meet its objectives? Has the scope changed?
- What activities were supported by the project during the reporting period? Were they all part of the original project plan?
- Has the approach or the methodology changed?
- Is the project still on time for completion on or before the grant expiry date (which includes preparation of final reports)?
- Are there important research findings and outputs coming out of the project? What are they and what will be done with them?
- Is the project helping build up the research capacity of your institution or of the individuals involved?
- What adjustments are needed to improve future performance?
- What activities are planned for the next period and until the end of the project?
- Will the project be completed on budget?

In sum, the report should be an opportunity to reflect on the management of the project from various perspectives: technical, administrative, and financial.

IDRC does not wish to impose an undue burden on project leaders in preparing these reports. The amount of effort required can be reduced if project leaders are aware of the required content for these reports from the beginning, so that they can think about it during the life of the project. An ongoing exercise of self-assessment of this nature can be a useful tool for keeping a project on track and making any necessary adjustments.

Format

The report should include the following:

Title page and table of contents

The title page should include the name of the project, the IDRC grant number, the name of the research institution and country where the project was carried out, the names of members of the research team, the time period that the report covers, and the date of presentation to IDRC. A table of contents is optional, but is recommended for longer documents. See Annex A for title page template.

Synthesis

The report should begin with a half-page to one-page synthesis of the project which situates the work in the period with respect to the project as a whole. The abstract of the project written when the grant was initially approved by IDRC and the objectives listed in the grant agreement should be useful inputs for preparing this part of the report.

The research problem

The reader should be reminded of the basic rationale of the project and the research problem or problems being addressed. Often, the researchers' understanding of the problems will have evolved since the project was approved. The report should describe this evolution and the reasons behind it. Restate the objectives where necessary. Major changes must be acknowledged and agreed to by IDRC.

Research findings

The main research results to date should be described and interpreted by highlighting the contribution to knowledge that this project represents from a scientific and policy perspective.

The report should address the degree of progress toward the achievement of each objective specified in the grant agreement, including the general objective. Include any new or modified objectives.

Project implementation and management

Briefly describe the activities supported under the project during the reporting period. Describe and discuss the research methods and analytical techniques used and any problems that arose. Indicate and explain any changes in orientation that may have occurred since the project was designed. Where applicable, comment on the financial variances which resulted from the activities of the project.

If relevant, please comment on specific aspects of project design such as:

- any partnerships with Canadians or with other researchers, and their usefulness in achieving the project's objectives;
- the disciplinary orientation of the project;
- the involvement of research users or ultimate beneficiaries, or their representatives, in identifying the project idea, project design and implementation, reviewing results, and utilization; and
- features addressing gender issues.

Address other project management issues that affected the project during the reporting period and that will bear on the future of the project:

- administration by the research organization;
- human resources (staffing, turnover, etc.);

- forecasted expenditures for the next reporting period and until the end of the project (comment on the financial forecast included in the interim financial report, with respect to the activities planned for the next reporting period, highlighting variances from the original plan or from the last forecast);
- the project schedule; and
- technical and other support and administration by IDRC.

Project outputs and dissemination

Provide a list of project outputs to date. Identify any outputs that are anticipated, but which have yet to materialize.

Wherever relevant, please specify what dissemination efforts were made.

Three general categories of outputs can be identified:

- information sharing and dissemination (reports, publications, conferences, Web sites, CD-ROMs etc.);
- knowledge creation (new knowledge embodied in forms other than publications or reports: new technologies, new methodologies, new curricula, new policies etc.); and
- training (short-term training, internships or fellowships, training seminars and workshops, thesis supervision etc.).

Capacity-building

Indicate what capacity-building impact the project may have had on the following:

- institutional reinforcement and sustainability of the research organization (new equipment, training, improved administrative skills, lessons learned etc.);
- increased research or administrative skills of the researchers involved; and
- any particular contribution to capacity-building of women or marginalized social groups.

Impact

Describe and assess any development impact that the project may have had or might be expected to have. A useful distinction can be made here between the concepts of reach and impact. Reach refers to the reception and use of the knowledge produced. Impact refers to the influence of this new knowledge on decisions or on development more generally. Special attention should be paid to the expected impact on marginalized social groups.

Recommendations

Include a summary of any recommendations you would like to make to IDRC with respect to the administration of the project (scope, duration, or budget). These recommendations should draw on all the background information provided under “Project implementation and management”.

Annex A: Template for Interim Report

Interim reports submitted to IDRC must include a title page. The kind of information that should be included is listed below. Items marked with an asterisk are particularly important and must appear.

***Project Title:**

***IDRC Project Number-Component Number** (*if applicable*):

Subtitle:

***By:** *Full Name(s) of Author(s)*

***Report Type and #:** *e.g. 1st Progress Report, 2nd Interim Report*

***Period covered by the report:** *e.g. January – December 2007*

***Date:** *Date the report is submitted*

***Country/Region:** *Country(ies) or region(s) where project was carried out*

***Full Name of Research Institution:**

***Address of Research Institution:**

***Name(s) of Researcher/Members of Research Team:**

***Contact Information of Researcher/Research Team members:**