

GUIDELINES FOR FIVE-YEAR EVALUATION

- I. Purpose of the Evaluation/Substantive Research Questions
- II. Selection of Evaluators
- III. Format of Report

Guiding Principles for the Evaluation (attachment)



I. Purpose of the Evaluation/Substantive Research Questions

Section 9134 (c) of IMLS’ authorizing legislation directs SLAAs to “independently evaluate, and report to the (IMLS) Director regarding, the activities assisted under this subchapter, prior to the end of the 5-year plan.” This evaluation provides SLAAs an opportunity to measure progress in meeting the targets set in their approved five-year plans and is designed to help states make effective resource allocation decisions in their upcoming five-year plans.

While both of these goals are important, previous guidance documents from IMLS focused primarily on the assessment of past practice. To make a more deliberate link between the evaluation findings and the SLAAs’ next five-year plans, IMLS is providing new guidance. This guidance identifies a core set of research questions that are designed to:

- highlight effective past practices;
- identify processes at work in implementing the activities in the plan, including the use of performance-based measurements in planning, policy making and administration, and;
- develop key findings and recommendations from evaluating the past five years for inclusion in the next five-year planning cycle.
- The questions below are divided into three main areas: retrospective assessments, process assessments, and prospective analysis. Below each set of research questions we have identified strategies for addressing the question. These are not designed to be an exhaustive list of research or data collection strategies but rather as a point of departure to assist SLAAs in planning their evaluation work.

Key Evaluation Questions for the Five-Year Evaluations Due in 2012

Retrospective Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did the activities undertaken through the state’s LSTA plan achieve results related to priorities identified in the Act? 2. To what extent were these results due to choices made in the selection of strategies? 3. To what extent did these results relate to subsequent implementation?
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	4. To what extent did programs and services benefit targeted individuals and groups?
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Strategies for addressing these questions:

1. Make use of administrative data on program performance. This information can be from state level administrative data, data that is reported to IMLS on the SPR, administrative data collected from sub-grantees, etc.
2. The administrative data will likely need to be supplemented with data collected from interviews, surveys, and/or focus groups with key stakeholders.
3. Information may also be provided from secondary documents, including contracted third-party program evaluations, studies from non-partisan entities, and any SLAA reports submitted to IMLS, state policy makers, and/or other parties.
4. Other sources of information, such as Census data, state education data, and surveys conducted by the SLAA may be used to describe broad changes in communities or in the state. While these, for the most part, cannot be used for making direct attributions of outcomes from LSTA programming efforts, they can be effective in describing the context of activities undertaken.
5. In conducting quantitative analysis from each of the data sources, we only expect descriptive statistics including cross-tabulations as appropriate. The mixing of summary tables and/or figures summarizing the results in the narrative is customary in this type of research. More in-depth statistical output is generally reserved for appendices (see below for more details under questions in describing the evaluation methodology).
6. In conducting qualitative analysis from the above data sources, we expect some form of content analysis with possibly descriptive statistics. There are various types of sampling and coding strategies that will precede the analytical choices and we expect that they will be made transparent and justified when describing the evaluation methodology adopted (see below for more details under questions in describing the evaluation methodology).

Process Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Were modifications made to the SLAA’s plan? If so, please specify the modifications and if they were informed by outcome-based data? 2. If modifications were made to the SLAA’s plan, how were performance metrics used in guiding those decisions? 3. How have performance metrics been used to guide
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	<p>policy and managerial decisions affecting the SLAA’s LSTA supported programs and services?</p> <p>4. What have been important challenges to using outcome-based data to guide policy and managerial decisions over the past five years?</p>
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Strategies for addressing these questions:

1. Make use of administrative documents, including the agency’s strategic plan and associated programmatic plans, annual budgets, memos, administrative rule changes, periodic reports to IMLS and state policymakers, correspondence with sub-entities, and media stories.
2. This data will likely need to be supplemented with data collected from interviews and/or focus groups with key stakeholders within and outside of the SLAA.
3. In conducting quantitative analysis from each of the data sources, we only expect descriptive statistics including cross-tabulations as appropriate. The mixing of summary tables and/or figures summarizing the results in the narrative is customary in this type of research. More in-depth statistical output is generally reserved for appendices.
4. In conducting qualitative analysis from the above data sources, we expect some form of content analysis with possibly descriptive statistics. There are various types of sampling and coding strategies that will precede the analytical choices and we expect that they will be made transparent and justified when describing the evaluation methodology adopted (see below for more details under questions in describing the evaluation methodology).

<p>Prospective Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the SLAA plan to share performance metrics and other evaluation-related information within and outside of the SLAA to inform policy and administrative decisions during the next five years? 2. How can the performance data collected and analyzed to date be used to identify benchmarks in the upcoming five-year plan?
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	<p>3. What key lessons has the SLAA learned about using outcome-based evaluation that other States could benefit from knowing? Include what worked and what should be changed.</p>
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Strategies for addressing these questions:

1. Data for answering these questions will likely need to be generated from surveys, interviews, and/or focus group.
2. It also may be advisable to use social media (e.g., wikis) to collect information.
3. In conducting quantitative analysis from each of the data sources, we only expect descriptive statistics including cross-tabulations as appropriate. The mixing of summary tables and/or figures summarizing the results in the narrative is customary in this type of research. More in-depth statistical output is generally reserved for appendices (see below for more details under questions in describing the evaluation methodology).
4. The evaluators should be given discretion for recommending alternative evaluation methods as long as they can provide adequate justification following the guiding principles of the American Evaluation Association (see attached).
5. In conducting qualitative analysis from the above data sources, we expect some form of content analysis with possibly descriptive statistics (see below for more details under questions in describing the evaluation methodology).

<p>Optional Prospective Questions</p>	<p>Answering the following questions is intended to help SLAAs jump start their five-year planning process. While there is no expectation that they be addressed in the five-year evaluation, they will need to be considered systematically in the next five-year plan.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the major challenges and opportunities that the SLAA and its partners can address to make outcome-based data more useful to federal and state policy makers as well as other stakeholders? 2. Based on the findings from the evaluation, include
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	<p>recommendations for justifying the continuation, expansion and/or adoption of promising programs in the next five-year plan.</p> <p>3. Based on the findings from the evaluation, include recommendations for justifying potential cuts and/or elimination of programs in the next five-year plan.</p>
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Strategies for addressing these questions:

1. Data for answering these questions will likely need to be generated from surveys, interviews, meetings, and/or focus groups.
2. It also may be advisable to use social media (e.g., wikis) to collect information.
3. It is very important for the answers to these questions to be framed to reinforce the independence of the evaluators' judgments.
4. In conducting qualitative analysis from the above data sources for addressing the first optional question, we expect some form of content analysis. There are various types of sampling and coding strategies that will precede the analytical choices, and we expect that they will be made transparent and justified when describing the evaluation methodology adopted (see below for more details under questions in describing the evaluation methodology).
5. When recommendations are made based on the evaluators' judgments, it is expected that the evaluators will provide explicit reference to previously cited evidence in the evaluation report to support the contentions.

<p>Questions in Describing the Evaluation Methodology</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify how the SLAA implemented the selection of an independent evaluation using the criteria described in the next section of this guidance document. 2. Explain who was involved in conducting the various stages of the evaluation. What stakeholders provided and interpreted evaluation data? 3. Describe the types of statistical and qualitative methods used in conducting the evaluation. Include administrative information as well.
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Document any tradeoffs made in the selection and implementation of the selected evaluation methods. 5. Discuss strategies used for disseminating and communicating the key findings and recommendations. 6. Assess the validity and reliability of the data used for conducting this evaluation study.
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Strategies for addressing these questions:

1. These questions should be carefully addressed before implementing the evaluation in developing a research plan.
2. Careful documentation of project records also will be needed.
Remember: professional guidelines for this type of research require protocols in place to ensure confidentiality and consent. If in doubt, we suggest you receive clearance for the type of research methods used in the evaluation with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the institution conducting the evaluation. If the institution conducting the evaluation does not have an IRB, contact the Research and Statistics Office at IMLS.
3. Addressing these questions in the formal evaluation report is customarily done towards the beginning of the document. In working with the independent evaluator, other stakeholders reviewing the document should have set aside appropriate time in the beginning of the investigation to assure that they have enough knowledge of the scientific techniques that the evaluators will be using, including tradeoffs that they are making.
4. The section should provide specific details for the reader to understand the methods used in any statistical and qualitative research conducted in the evaluation. For qualitative research, we recognize that many types of sampling and coding strategies may be appropriate; we expect that they will be made transparent and justified in this section of the report. It is acceptable to include appendices of any instruments used for data collection as well as those used in coding.

II. Selection of Evaluators

An effective evaluation is one that is both rigorous and objective (carried out free from outside influence).

The evaluation can be carried out by contract with an independent and professional evaluator. If a State decides to carry out the evaluation within the government, the evaluator should be able to demonstrate that the evaluator does not have a role in carrying out LSTA-funded activities and is independent of those who are being evaluated or who might be favorably or adversely affected by the evaluation results. If the evaluation is carried out within the State entity that includes the SLAA, the line of hierarchy within the entity should demonstrate that the evaluator is not accountable to those responsible for oversight of the LSTA program within the State.

The evaluator must be able to demonstrate professional competency to rigorously conduct the evaluation, including demonstrated expertise in statistical and qualitative research methods.

Trade Offs of Internal and External Evaluators

In certain situations, hiring an external evaluation consultant or evaluation team may be appropriate and/or required. Generally speaking, expertise, impartiality, cost, and time are key considerations for employing an external consultant/team for an evaluation. That is, the scope and complexity of the evaluation may demand the expertise of an external consultant; or, where personnel resources and timeframe are more scarce than funding, an external evaluator may be the better choice. The following table presents considerations associated with employing an internal team member versus an external consultant:

Internal	External
Timely – Immediately the program/project has information that begins informing program/policy decisions.	Perspective – An external evaluation may provide a view of the program that is considered more objective by the intended users.
Buy-in – Those involved have the opportunity to have their voices heard, and may want to contribute to the evaluation.	Credible – An external evaluation may be perceived as having more credibility for people outside of the program/project (funding partners, stakeholders, etc.)
“Insider” perspective – An in-house evaluator may be more familiar with the staff, community, issues, and resources associated with the project/program.	Expertise – An external evaluator or team may possess certain evaluation research skills and knowledge that the internal evaluator may not. S/he may also have exposure to a wider range of issues, methods, and practices that would be useful to incorporate.

III. Format of Report

IMLS analyzes and makes public all LSTA five-year evaluations. In order to do this effectively, certain information needs to be included in all evaluation reports. One objective of this guidance is to better enable IMLS to tell federal policy makers what has happened at a national level by better assuring tighter conformity in the organization of each of the SLAA evaluation reports. The guidelines should be given to any staff member, partner, interns, or consultant doing evaluation work for the SLAA in order to ensure that all evaluation reports include the following:

1. Cover Page: (1 page)
 - State Library Administrative Agency.
 - Title of the evaluation.
 - Evaluator(s) name and organizational affiliation.
 - Date.
 - Name of the team, branch, unit, or person commissioning the evaluation.

2. Evaluation Summary
 - Prepare a brief 2-5 page description of the main findings.
 - Summarize the major questions addressed in the evaluation.
 - Briefly describe the methods used in producing the evidence to address the questions.
 - Present key findings to the questions. Report findings should address each of the IMLS Congressional priorities were referenced in the State's five-year plan.
 - Discuss key recommendations.

3. Body of the Evaluation Report
 - Document size: The body of the evaluation report is not expected to exceed 25 pages.
 - Background of the study: This should detail the intended user(s) and use(s) of the evaluation process and/or product; the specific evaluation questions or issues addressed; and the values and principles guiding the evaluation process.
 - Description of the methodology employed: This should include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design, tools and methods used, the process followed, data sources, and people interviewed. It should describe how the project/program stakeholders and the intended user(s) of the evaluation participated in the process. It should also comment on the validity and reliability of the evidence as well as any ethical considerations.
 - Evaluation findings: This section should be formulated according to the evaluation plan and the terms of reference (TORs) of the evaluation

study. The findings should be organized around each specific priority in the IMLS authorization addressed under the State's five-year plan.

4. Annexes

- List of acronyms.
- List of people interviewed (with full coordinates if appropriate and not in breach of confidentiality).
- Bibliography of all documents reviewed.
- Optional output of statistical findings.
- Optional summaries of coding used in any qualitative analyses.
- Copies of any research instruments used for surveying, interviewing, and/or use of focus groups.

SEND YOUR REPORT TO IMLS

Please send an electronic version of your Five-Year Evaluation by March 30, 2012 to: stateprograms@imls.gov

Please send one paper copy of your Five-Year Evaluation by March 30, 2012 to:

Laurie C. Brooks
Associate Deputy Director for State Programs
Institute of Museum and Library Services
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AMERICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATORS

Revisions reflected herein ratified by the AEA membership, July 2004

Preface: Assumptions Concerning Development of Principles

A. Evaluation is a profession composed of persons with varying interests, potentially encompassing but not limited to the evaluation of programs, products, personnel, policy, performance, proposals, technology, research, theory, and even of evaluation itself. These principles are broadly intended to cover all kinds of evaluation. For external evaluations of public programs, they nearly always apply. However, it is impossible to write guiding principles that neatly fit every context in which evaluators work, and some evaluators will work in contexts in which following a guideline cannot be done for good reason. The Guiding Principles are not intended to constrain such evaluators when this is the case. However, such exceptions should be made for good reason (e.g., legal prohibitions against releasing information to stakeholders), and evaluators who find themselves in such contexts should consult colleagues about how to proceed.

B. Based on differences in training, experience, and work settings, the profession of evaluation encompasses diverse perceptions about the primary purpose of evaluation. These include but are not limited to the following: bettering products, personnel, programs, organizations, governments, consumers and the public interest; contributing to informed decision making and more enlightened change; precipitating needed change; empowering all stakeholders by collecting data from them and engaging them in the evaluation process; and experiencing the excitement of new insights. Despite that diversity, the common ground is that evaluators aspire to construct and provide the best possible information that might bear on the value of whatever is being evaluated. The principles are intended to foster that primary aim.

C. The principles are intended to guide the professional practice of evaluators, and to inform evaluation clients and the general public about the principles they can expect to be upheld by professional evaluators. Of course, no statement of principles can anticipate all situations that arise in the practice of evaluation. However, principles are not just guidelines for reaction when something goes wrong or when a dilemma is found. Rather, principles should proactively guide the behaviors of professionals in everyday practice.

D. The purpose of documenting guiding principles is to foster continuing development of the profession of evaluation, and the socialization of its members. The principles are meant to stimulate discussion about the proper practice and use of evaluation among members of the profession, sponsors of evaluation, and others interested in evaluation.

E. The five principles proposed in this document are not independent, but overlap in many ways. Conversely, sometimes these principles will conflict, so that evaluators will have to choose among them. At such times evaluators must use their own values and knowledge of the setting to determine the appropriate response. Whenever a course of action is unclear, evaluators should solicit the advice of fellow evaluators about how to resolve the problem before deciding how to proceed.

F. These principles are intended to supercede any previous work on standards, principles, or ethics adopted by AEA or its two predecessor organizations, the Evaluation Research Society and the Evaluation Network. These principles are the official position of AEA on these matters.

G. These principles are not intended to replace standards supported by evaluators or by the other disciplines in which evaluators participate.

H. Each principle is illustrated by a number of statements to amplify the meaning of the overarching principle, and to provide guidance for its application. These illustrations are not meant to include all possible applications of that principle, nor to be viewed as rules that provide the basis for sanctioning violators.

I. These principles were developed in the context of Western cultures, particularly the United States, and so may reflect the experiences of that context. The relevance of these principles may vary across other cultures, and across subcultures within the United States.

J. These principles are part of an evolving process of self-examination by the profession, and should be revisited on a regular basis. Mechanisms might include officially-sponsored reviews of principles at annual meetings, and other forums for harvesting experience with the principles and their application. On a regular basis, but at least every five years, these principles ought to be examined for possible review and revision. In order to maintain association-wide awareness and relevance, all AEA members are encouraged to participate in this process.

The Principles

A. Systematic Inquiry: Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries.

1. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the evaluative information they produce, evaluators should adhere to the highest technical standards appropriate to the methods they use.
2. Evaluators should explore with the client the shortcomings and strengths both of the various evaluation questions and the various approaches that might be used for answering those questions.
3. Evaluators should communicate their methods and approaches accurately and in sufficient detail to allow others to understand, interpret and critique their work. They should make clear the limitations of an evaluation and its results. Evaluators should discuss in a contextually appropriate way those values, assumptions, theories, methods, results, and analyses significantly affecting the interpretation of the evaluative findings. These statements apply to all aspects of the evaluation, from its initial conceptualization to the eventual use of findings.

B. Competence: Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.

1. Evaluators should possess (or ensure that the evaluation team possesses) the education, abilities, skills and experience appropriate to undertake the tasks proposed in the evaluation.
2. To ensure recognition, accurate interpretation and respect for diversity, evaluators should ensure that the members of the evaluation team collectively demonstrate cultural competence. Cultural competence would be reflected in evaluators seeking awareness of their own culturally-based assumptions, their understanding of the worldviews of culturally-different participants and stakeholders in the evaluation, and the use of appropriate evaluation strategies and skills in working with culturally different groups. Diversity may be in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economics, or other factors pertinent to the evaluation context.
3. Evaluators should practice within the limits of their professional training and competence, and should decline to conduct evaluations that fall substantially outside those limits. When declining the commission or request is not feasible or appropriate, evaluators should make clear any significant limitations on the evaluation that might result. Evaluators should make every effort to gain the competence directly or through the assistance of others who possess the required expertise.

4. Evaluators should continually seek to maintain and improve their competencies, in order to provide the highest level of performance in their evaluations. This continuing professional development might include formal coursework and workshops, self-study, evaluations of one's own practice, and working with other evaluators to learn from their skills and expertise.

C. Integrity/Honesty: Evaluators display honesty and integrity in their own behavior, and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.

1. Evaluators should negotiate honestly with clients and relevant stakeholders concerning the costs, tasks to be undertaken, limitations of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and uses of data resulting from a specific evaluation. It is primarily the evaluator's responsibility to initiate discussion and clarification of these matters, not the client's.

2. Before accepting an evaluation assignment, evaluators should disclose any roles or relationships they have that might pose a conflict of interest (or appearance of a conflict) with their role as an evaluator. If they proceed with the evaluation, the conflict(s) should be clearly articulated in reports of the evaluation results.

3. Evaluators should record all changes made in the originally negotiated project plans, and the reasons why the changes were made. If those changes would significantly affect the scope and likely results of the evaluation, the evaluator should inform the client and other important stakeholders in a timely fashion (barring good reason to the contrary, before proceeding with further work) of the changes and their likely impact.

4. Evaluators should be explicit about their own, their clients', and other stakeholders' interests and values concerning the conduct and outcomes of an evaluation.

5. Evaluators should not misrepresent their procedures, data or findings. Within reasonable limits, they should attempt to prevent or correct misuse of their work by others.

6. If evaluators determine that certain procedures or activities are likely to produce misleading evaluative information or conclusions, they have the responsibility to communicate their concerns and the reasons for them. If discussions with the client do not resolve these concerns, the evaluator should decline to conduct the evaluation. If declining the assignment is unfeasible or inappropriate, the evaluator should consult colleagues or relevant stakeholders about other proper ways to proceed. (Options might include discussions at a higher level, a dissenting cover letter or appendix, or refusal to sign the final document.)

7. Evaluators should disclose all sources of financial support for an evaluation, and the source of the request for the evaluation.

D. Respect for People: Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and other evaluation stakeholders.

1. Evaluators should seek a comprehensive understanding of the important contextual elements of the evaluation. Contextual factors that may influence the results of a study include geographic location, timing, political and social climate, economic conditions, and other relevant activities in progress at the same time.

2. Evaluators should abide by current professional ethics, standards, and regulations regarding risks, harms, and burdens that might befall those participating in the evaluation; regarding informed consent

for participation in evaluation; and regarding informing participants and clients about the scope and limits of confidentiality.

3. Because justified negative or critical conclusions from an evaluation must be explicitly stated, evaluations sometimes produce results that harm client or stakeholder interests. Under this circumstance, evaluators should seek to maximize the benefits and reduce any unnecessary harms that might occur, provided this will not compromise the integrity of the evaluation findings. Evaluators should carefully judge when the benefits from doing the evaluation or in performing certain evaluation procedures should be foregone because of the risks or harms. To the extent possible, these issues should be anticipated during the negotiation of the evaluation.

4. Knowing that evaluations may negatively affect the interests of some stakeholders, evaluators should conduct the evaluation and communicate its results in a way that clearly respects the stakeholders' dignity and self-worth.

5. Where feasible, evaluators should attempt to foster social equity in evaluation, so that those who give to the evaluation may benefit in return. For example, evaluators should seek to ensure that those who bear the burdens of contributing data and incurring any risks do so willingly, and that they have full knowledge of and opportunity to obtain any benefits of the evaluation. Program participants should be informed that their eligibility to receive services does not hinge on their participation in the evaluation.

6. Evaluators have the responsibility to understand and respect differences among participants, such as differences in their culture, religion, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnicity, and to account for potential implications of these differences when planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting evaluations.

E. Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare: Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to the evaluation.

1. When planning and reporting evaluations, evaluators should include relevant perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders.

2. Evaluators should consider not only the immediate operations and outcomes of whatever is being evaluated, but also its broad assumptions, implications and potential side effects.

3. Freedom of information is essential in a democracy. Evaluators should allow all relevant stakeholders access to evaluative information in forms that respect people and honor promises of confidentiality. Evaluators should actively disseminate information to stakeholders as resources allow. Communications that are tailored to a given stakeholder should include all results that may bear on interests of that stakeholder and refer to any other tailored communications to other stakeholders. In all cases, evaluators should strive to present results clearly and simply so that clients and other stakeholders can easily understand the evaluation process and results.

4. Evaluators should maintain a balance between client needs and other needs. Evaluators necessarily have a special relationship with the client who funds or requests the evaluation. By virtue of that relationship, evaluators must strive to meet legitimate client needs whenever it is feasible and appropriate to do so. However, that relationship can also place evaluators in difficult dilemmas when client interests conflict with other interests, or when client interests conflict with the obligation of evaluators for systematic inquiry, competence, integrity, and respect for people. In these cases, evaluators should explicitly identify and discuss the conflicts with the client and relevant stakeholders, resolve them when possible, determine whether continued work on the evaluation is advisable if the

conflicts cannot be resolved, and make clear any significant limitations on the evaluation that might result if the conflict is not resolved.

5. Evaluators have obligations that encompass the public interest and good. These obligations are especially important when evaluators are supported by publicly-generated funds; but clear threats to the public good should never be ignored in any evaluation. Because the public interest and good are rarely the same as the interests of any particular group (including those of the client or funder), evaluators will usually have to go beyond analysis of particular stakeholder interests and consider the welfare of society as a whole.