

CNCS Research Summit
Focus on Evidence

An Expert's Perspective

A conversation with experts on evidence and the
role of government

An Expert's Perspective

Moderated by

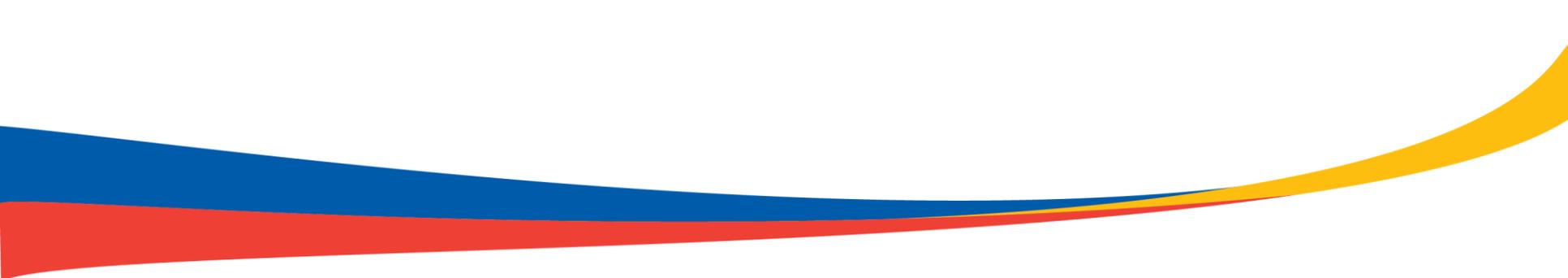
Wendy Spencer, CEO, Corporation for National and Community Service

Panelists include

Ron Haskins, Co-Director of the Brookings Center on Children and Families and Budgeting for National Priorities Project, The Brookings Institution

Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, Director of the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, George Washington University

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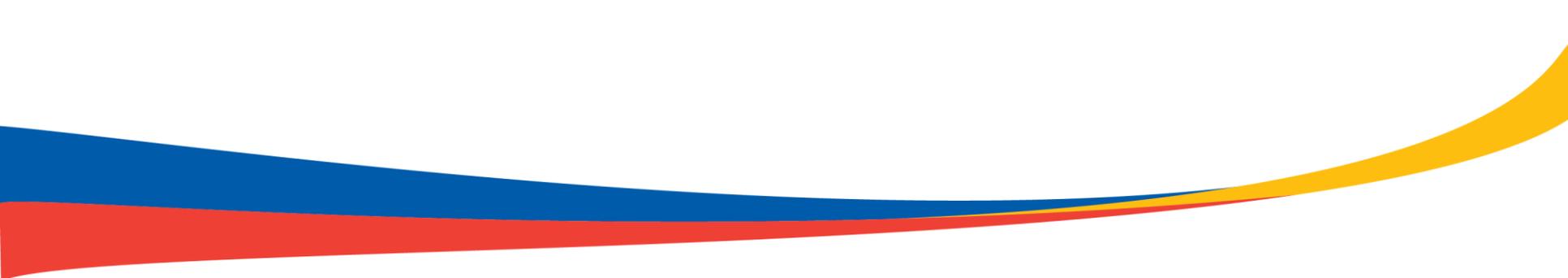
Ron Haskins

*Co-Director of the Brookings Center on Children
and Families and Budgeting for National Priorities
Project,*
The Brookings Institution

Show Me the Evidence: The Culture of Evidence is Growing

Growth of an Evidence-Based Culture

- Obama's evidence-based initiatives; 1,400 local projects
- Clearinghouses with lists of evidence-based programs
- OMB emphasizes evaluation by agencies
- "Nudge" unit in White House
- Growth of Pay for Success; more than 30 projects
- Results First (Pew and MacArthur; Clearinghouse)
- Results for America
- Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy
- Foundation support: Pew; MacArthur; Grant; Arnold; Annie E. Casey; Casey Family Programs; Edna McConnell Clark; Gates; others



Dr. Kathryn Newcomer

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Policy and Public Administration,
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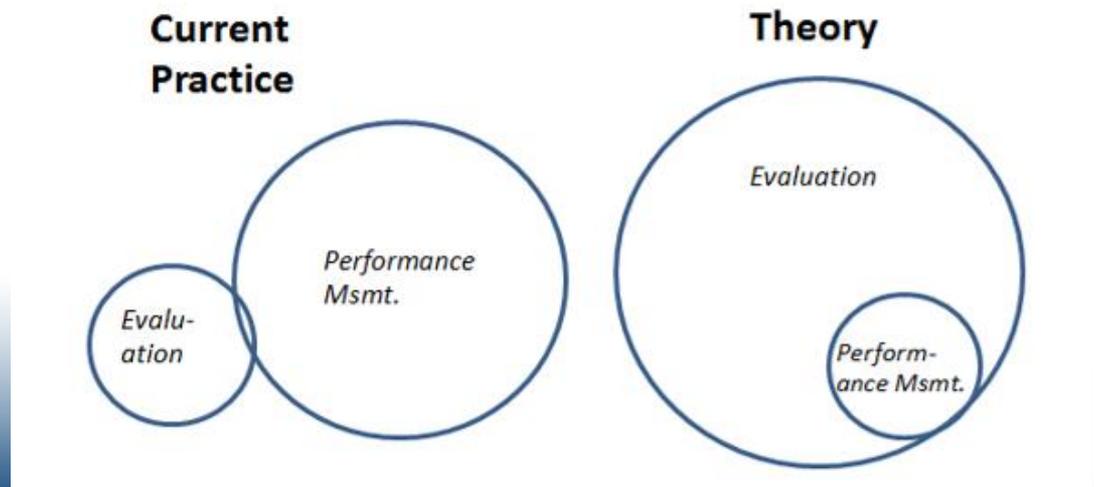
“Evidence-based Policy,” “Data-Driven Decision-making”— the New Normal?



Setting the Stage...

- **Program Evaluation:** application of systematic analytical (social science) methods to address questions about program operations and results, including:
 - *Performance Measurement (Monitoring):* routine measurement of program inputs, outputs, intermediate/ long-term outcomes attributed to a program

Both involve **measurement** + **judgment**!!



What are the Opportunities for Evidence to Inform Policymaking?

- Analyses of “performance” data collected by agencies (or delegated service delivery agents such as grantees)
- Implementation, Outcome and Impact evaluations performed by other agents for agencies
- Manipulations of services in experiments by agencies – “behavioral economics”
- Syntheses or systematic reviews of impact evaluations by external agents, e.g. websites like “What Works”
- Other?

What are Challenges for Evidence to Inform Policymaking?

- Expectations

- What constitutes evidence?
- How transferable is evidence?
- Do we underestimate the role played by the “impactees?”
- Where is the capacity to support both the demand and supply of evidence?

Why isn't There Agreement About the Quality of Evidence?

- Differing professional standards and “rules” or criteria for evidence, e.g., lawyers, accountants, engineers, economists
- Disagreements about methodologies within professional groups, e.g., RCTs
- The constancy of change in problems and the characteristics of the targeted impacttees

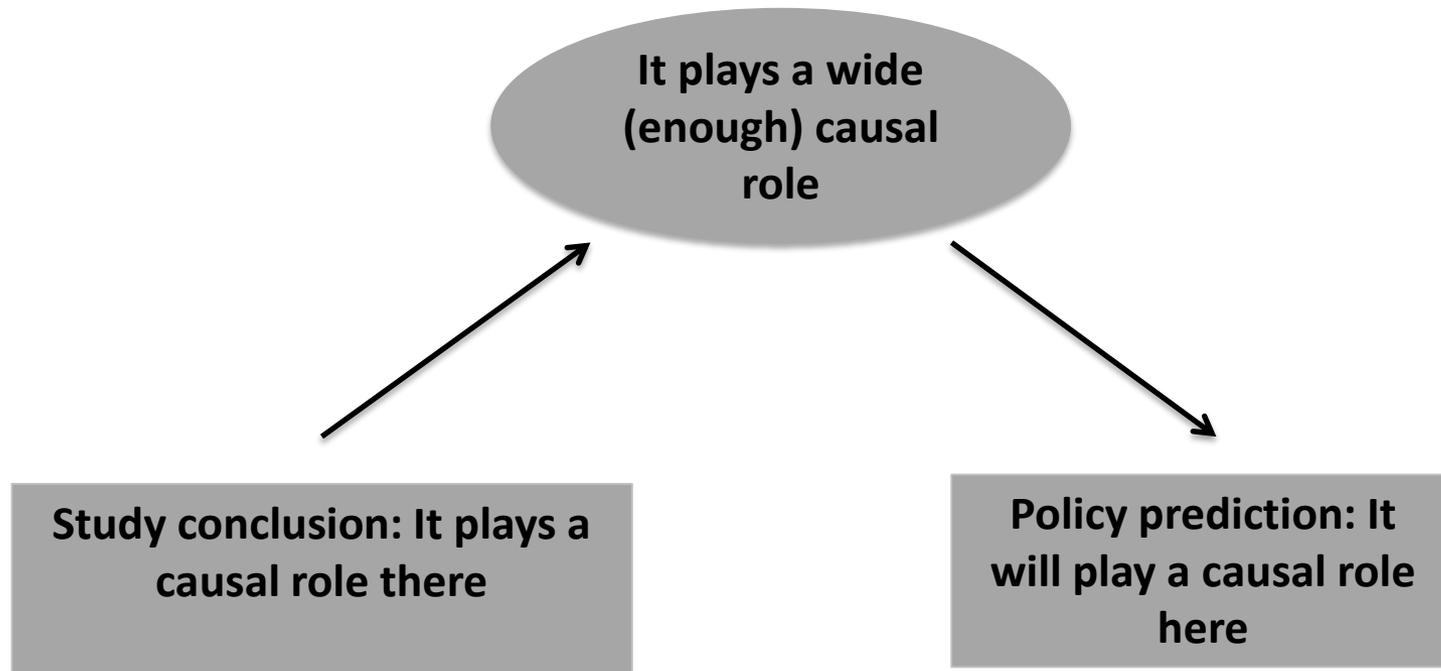
We Overstate the Certainty of the Evidence we Can Collect



- Perceptions of the certainty of “evidence” have changed.



We Overstate the Ease of Flow of Evidence



Source: Cartwright, N. (2013). Knowing what we are talking about: why evidence doesn't always travel. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 9(1), 97-112.

Why don't RCT results alone make for well-supported effectiveness predictions?

It will play a positive causal role here

It can play a positive causal role here

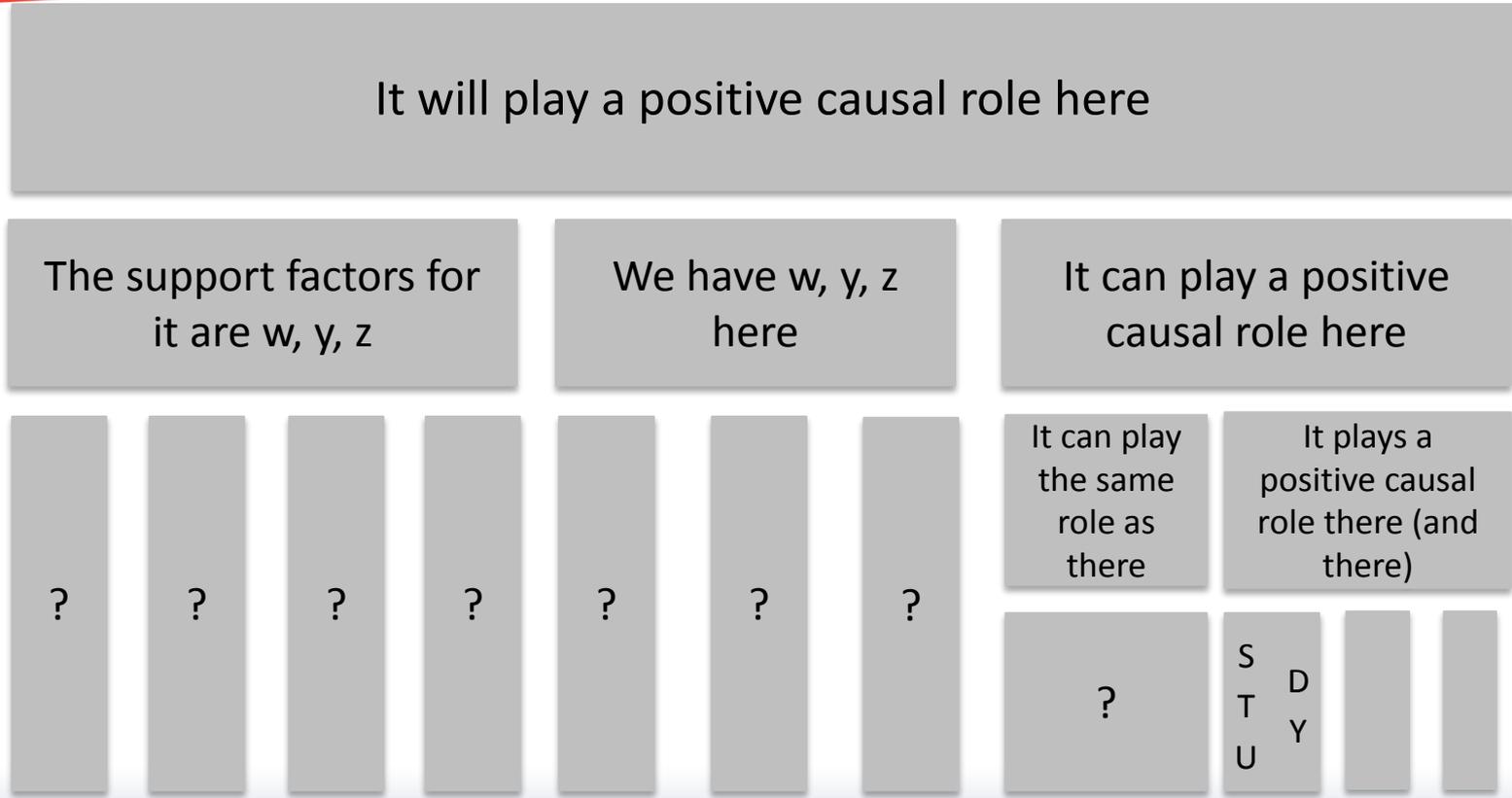
It plays a positive causal role there
(and there)

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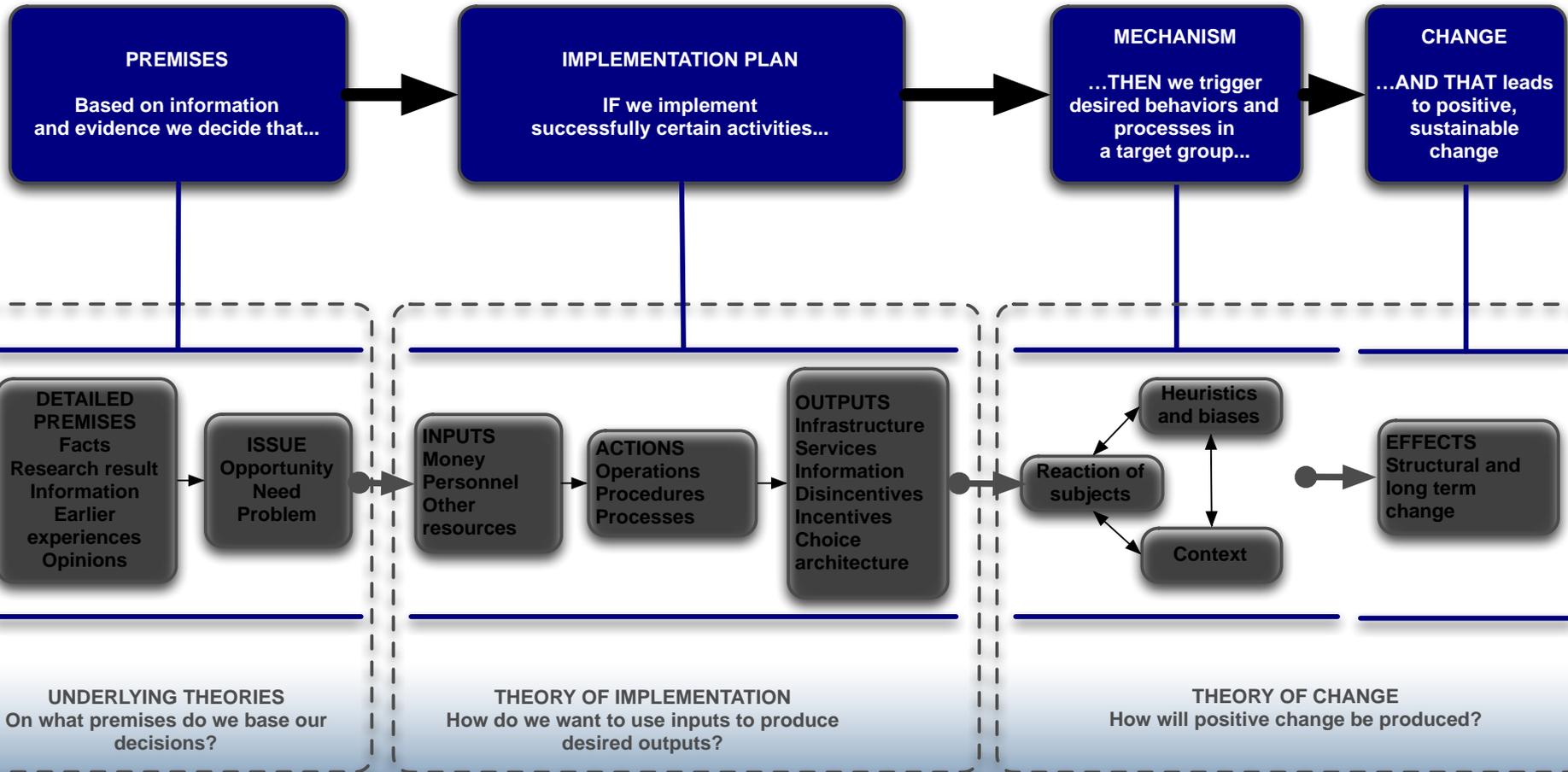
Source: Cartwright, N. (2013). Knowing what we are talking about: why evidence doesn't always travel. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 9(1), 97-112.

What is needed for a well-supported effectiveness (impact) prediction?



Source: Cartwright, N. (2013). Knowing what we are talking about: why evidence doesn't always travel. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 9(1), 97-112.

We Underestimate the Role of Volition Among Impactees and their Own Heuristics



Olejniczak, K. & Newcomer, K. (2014). "Moving towards accountability for learning";
in: Olejniczak, K. & Mazur, S. (eds.) Organizational Learning. A Framework for Public Administration, p.81-99. Warsaw: Scholar Publishing House.

We Overstate The Current Evaluation Capacity in the U.S. Federal Government



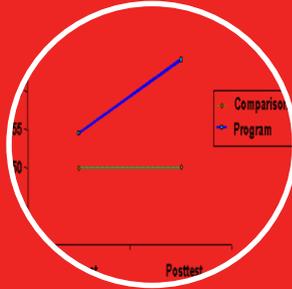
Evaluation Capacity = Both Demand and Supply

- Who is asking for the evidence?
- Is there a clear understanding between providers and requestors for what evidence is needed?
- Are there sufficient resources within agencies to respond to demand?
- What about the lack of interaction and synergies among the different potential providers of evidence - such as GPRA/GPRAMA reporting staff, internal evaluation staff, external evaluation contractors, SBST, data.gov teams, etc.!

Currently Fragmented and Non-Communicative



Performance
Measurement



Impact
Evaluation



Behavioral
Economics

To Strategic Use and Synergies!



Answers? Apply Program Evaluation Tools

- Apply an evaluative mind set as well as apply **appropriate** skills
- Key elements of evaluation practice of special use in providing and assessing evidence include:
 - Develop more realistic Theories of Change
 - Frame appropriate questions
 - Match designs to questions

Program Logic Models Typically Ignore Context

Focus of Evaluation

HOW

WHY

Resources/
Inputs

Activities

Outputs

Short-term
Outcomes

Intermediate
Outcomes

Long-term
Outcomes

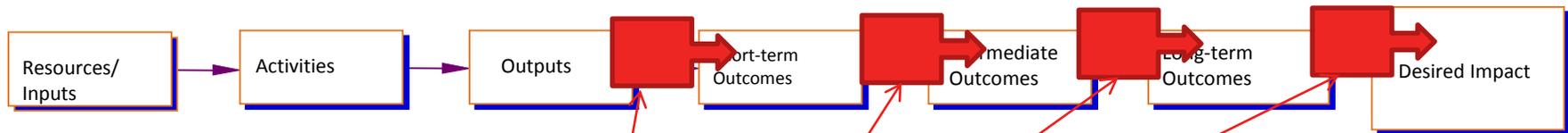
Desired Impact

Formative (Process/Implementation) Evaluation

Outcome
Evaluation

Impact
Evaluation

A More Elaborate Theory of Change?



Contextual Factors outside of the control of program staff affect the extent to which programs and policies achieve desired outcomes!

Identifying Key Contextual Factors is Especially Important in Understanding Our Theory of Change

- **Assumptions about linkages**, e.g., e.g., the teachers received the appropriate training to implement the new curriculum
- **“Unobservables”** in clients or beneficiaries- like motivation to continue in the mentoring program
- **External barriers** like lack of public transportation for clients to get to the service delivery site
- And some may reflect **forces of nature or changes in political will**, e.g., poor weather limits the amount of nature walks that are supposed to be included in the summer camping experience for inner city youth

Frame Useful Evaluation Questions

- The type of question – and type of desired evaluation – matter for determining appropriate methods:
 - **Descriptive Questions** – describe input levels, outputs, contextual variables and/or measurable outcomes
 - **Normative Questions** – assess levels of compliance for outputs or outcomes with criteria in law, regulation, or equity norms
 - **Impact Questions** – measures of effectiveness or “impact”
 - **Explanatory Questions** – explain implementation (fidelity) and processes

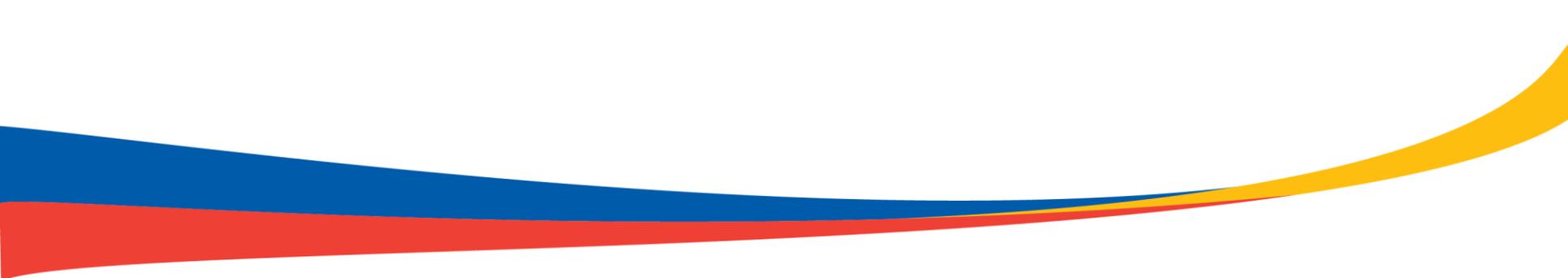
Match Design to Research Questions

Principles of Evaluation Design

1. Frame the most appropriate questions to address
2. Clear and answerable evaluation **questions drive the design** decisions
3. Design decisions are made to provide **appropriate data and comparisons** needed to address the evaluation questions
4. Decisions about measurement and design are made to bolster the **methodological integrity** of the results
5. During design deliberations careful consideration should be given to **strengthening inferences** about findings
6. Goal to report that evaluation design and reporting decisions were characterized by strong methodological integrity

Examples

Objective	Illustrative Questions	Possible Design
#1: Describe program (or regulatory) activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How extensive and costly are the program activities? • How do implementation efforts vary across sites, beneficiaries, regions? • Has the program been implemented sufficiently to be evaluated? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Measurement • Exploratory Evaluations • Evaluability Assessments • Multiple Case Studies
#2: Probe targeting & implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How closely are the protocols implemented with fidelity to the original design? • What key contextual factors are likely to affect intended outcomes? • What feasibility or management challenges hinder successful implementation of the program? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Case Studies • Implementation or Process evaluations • Performance Audits • Compliance Audits
#3: Measure impact of policy or regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the average effects across different implementations of the intervention? • Has implementation of the intervention produced results consistent with its design (espoused purpose)? • Is the implementation strategy more (or less) effective in relation to its costs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimental Designs/RCTs • Non-experimental Designs: Difference-in-difference, Propensity score matching, etc. • Cost-effectiveness & Benefit Cost Analysis • Systematic Reviews & Meta-Analyses
#4 : Explain how/ why produce (un)intended effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How/why did the program have the intended effects? • To what extent has implementation of the program had important unanticipated negative spillover effects? • How likely is it that the program will have similar effects in other communities or in the future? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact Pathways and Process tracing • System dynamics • Configurational analysis,



Kathy Stack

*Vice President of Evidence-Based Innovation,
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An Expert's Perspective – Q&A

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Focus on Evidence!**

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