



Developing a Long-Term Research Agenda



Learning objectives



By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of building a long-term research agenda
- Identify the various stages in building evidence of a program's effectiveness
- Understand the key questions to consider prior to developing a long-term research agenda for your program



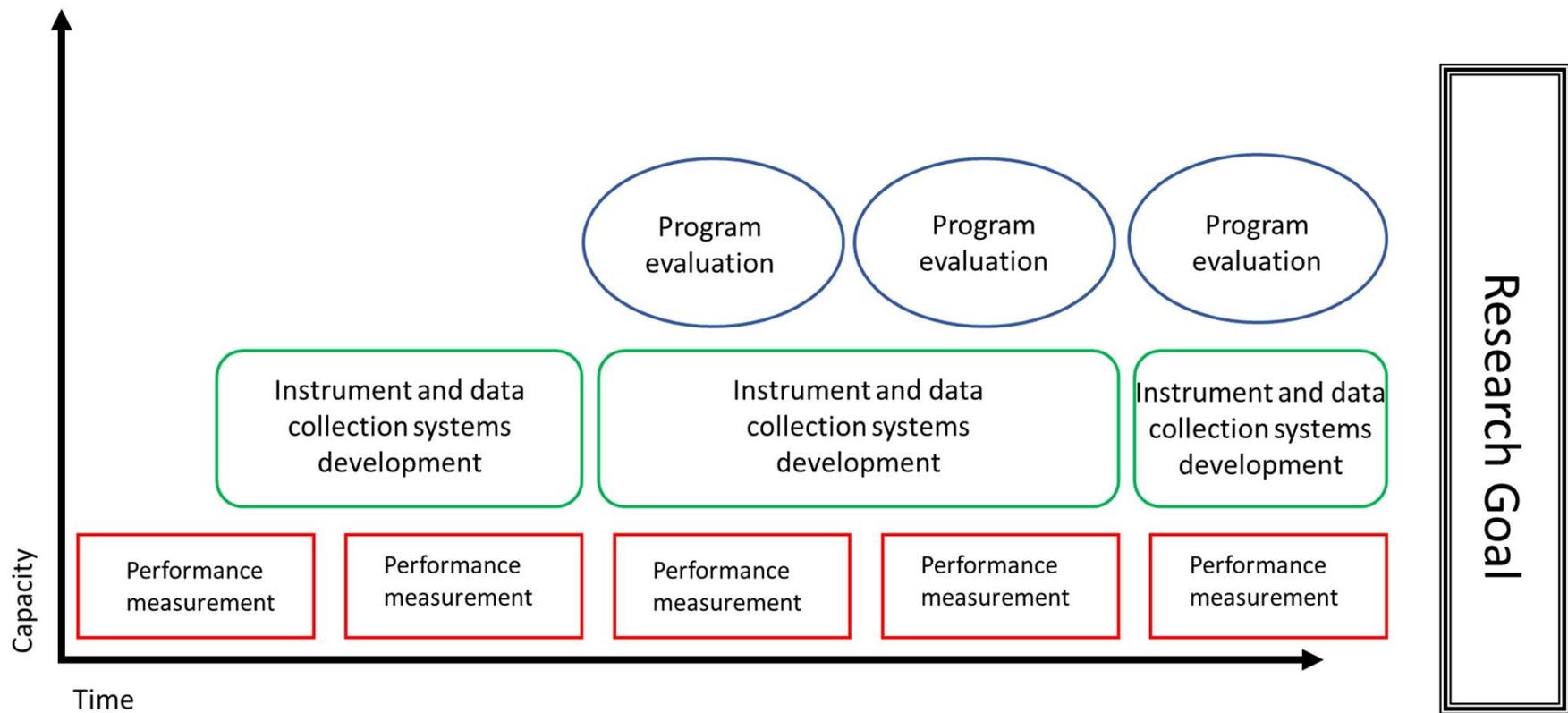
PART 1

Defining a long-term research agenda

What is a long-term research agenda?

- A long-term research agenda is a series of intentional or planned program evaluations and research tools that build towards addressing a research goal.
- Similar to a strategic plan, a research agenda generally spans over several years.
- A research agenda is unique and should be tailored to each individual program.
- A research agenda is a dynamic tool (i.e., a living document) that should be revised/updated based on new evidence, shifts in program direction, etc.

Long-term research agenda



A long-term research agenda is a series of intentional or planned program evaluations and research tools that build towards addressing a research goal.

Why is it important to have a long-term research agenda?

- A research agenda sets clear goals for what program stakeholders want or need to know about the program years into the future
- A research agenda defines your destination, then identifies the supporting steps that will get you there
- A research agenda continues to build evidence of program effectiveness
- A research agenda demonstrates strategic investment of funds in evaluation activities

Build a long-term research agenda

- What does a long-term research agenda look like?
 - What do we want to have learned 5 years from now? 10 years from now?
 - Work backwards: define your destination, then name the supporting steps that will get you there
 - Each evaluation should build on what you learned previously
 - If you invest evaluation money strategically, scarce resources can have a big impact

Example of a long-term research agenda

AmeriCorps program provides housing assistance for low-income families.

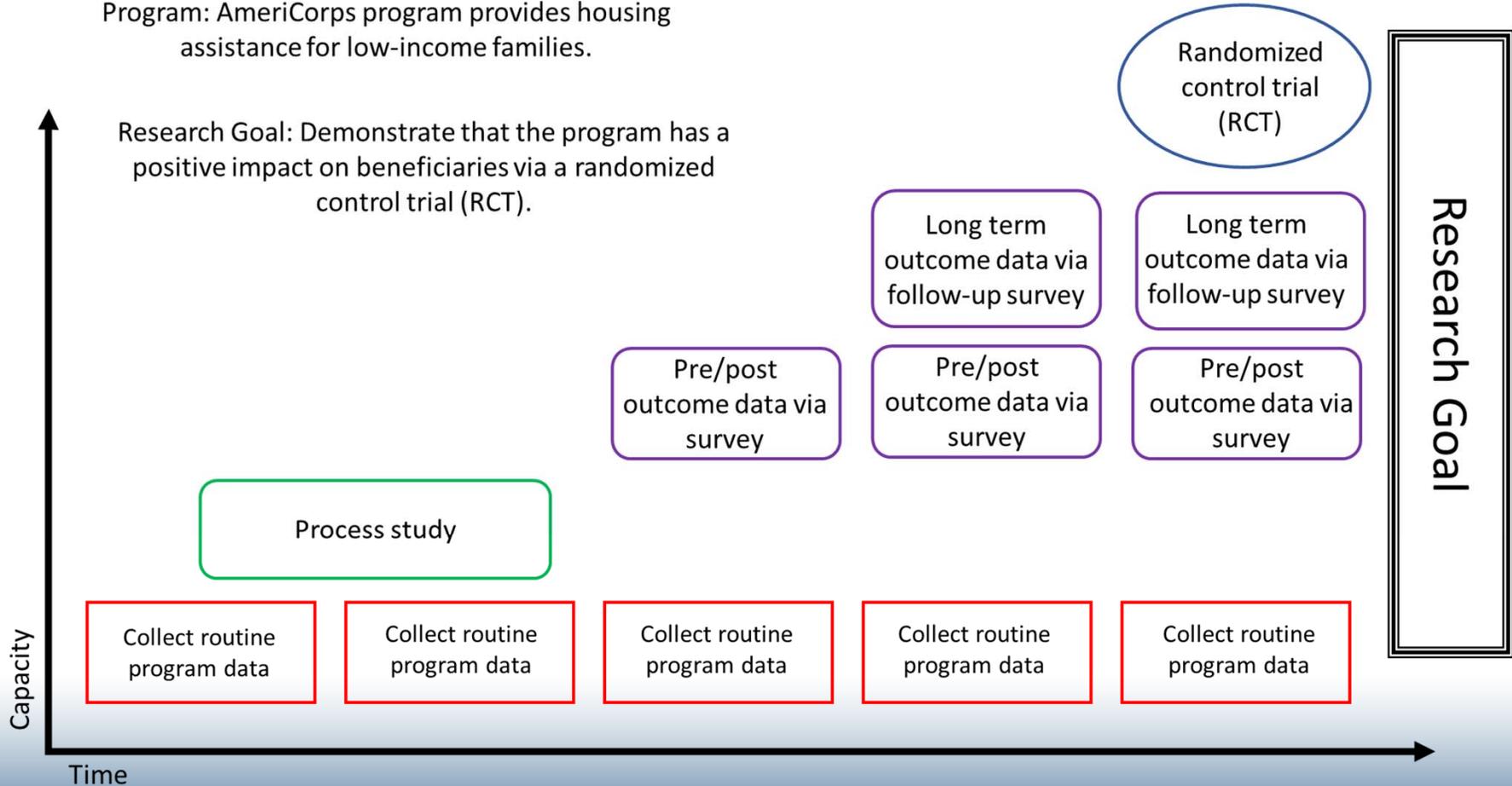
Goal: Demonstrate that the program has a positive impact on beneficiaries via a randomized control trial (RCT).

- Step 1: Collect program data, routinely, on family background characteristics and number of families served. [1st cycle]
- Step 2: Process study: Is the program being implemented with fidelity to the model? [1st cycle]
- Step 3: Collect pre/post outcome data each year via annual survey. [2nd cycle]
- Step 4: In addition to data collected from Steps 1&2, collect long-term outcomes data via follow-up survey (1 year post- program) [2nd cycle]
- Step 5: Demand for the program exceeds supply, so implement RCT by randomly assigning families to receive housing assistance. Collect background data and survey data from all eligible families. [3rd cycle]

Example: Stages in a long-term research agenda

Program: AmeriCorps program provides housing assistance for low-income families.

Research Goal: Demonstrate that the program has a positive impact on beneficiaries via a randomized control trial (RCT).



What to consider when developing a long-term research agenda

- Program maturity
 - How long the program has been in operation and its grant cycle timing
- Existing evidence base
 - Evidence that has already been generated on the program that the long-term research agenda should build off
- Funder requirements and other stakeholder needs
 - CNCS has specific evaluation requirements for its grantees and those requirements should be embedded in a program's long-term research agenda
 - Sometimes the same evaluation can meet the needs and requirements of multiple funders

What to consider when developing a long-term research agenda

- Long-term program goals
 - A long-term research agenda should be designed to systematically provide information that supports a program's long-term strategic goals
- Long-term research goals
 - Programs should have long-term research goals that relate to building evidence of effectiveness over time
- Evaluation budget
 - The amount of the program's funding base that will set aside for evaluation activities each year or each grant cycle

Exercise Part I: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda for your AmeriCorps program

Your AmeriCorps program

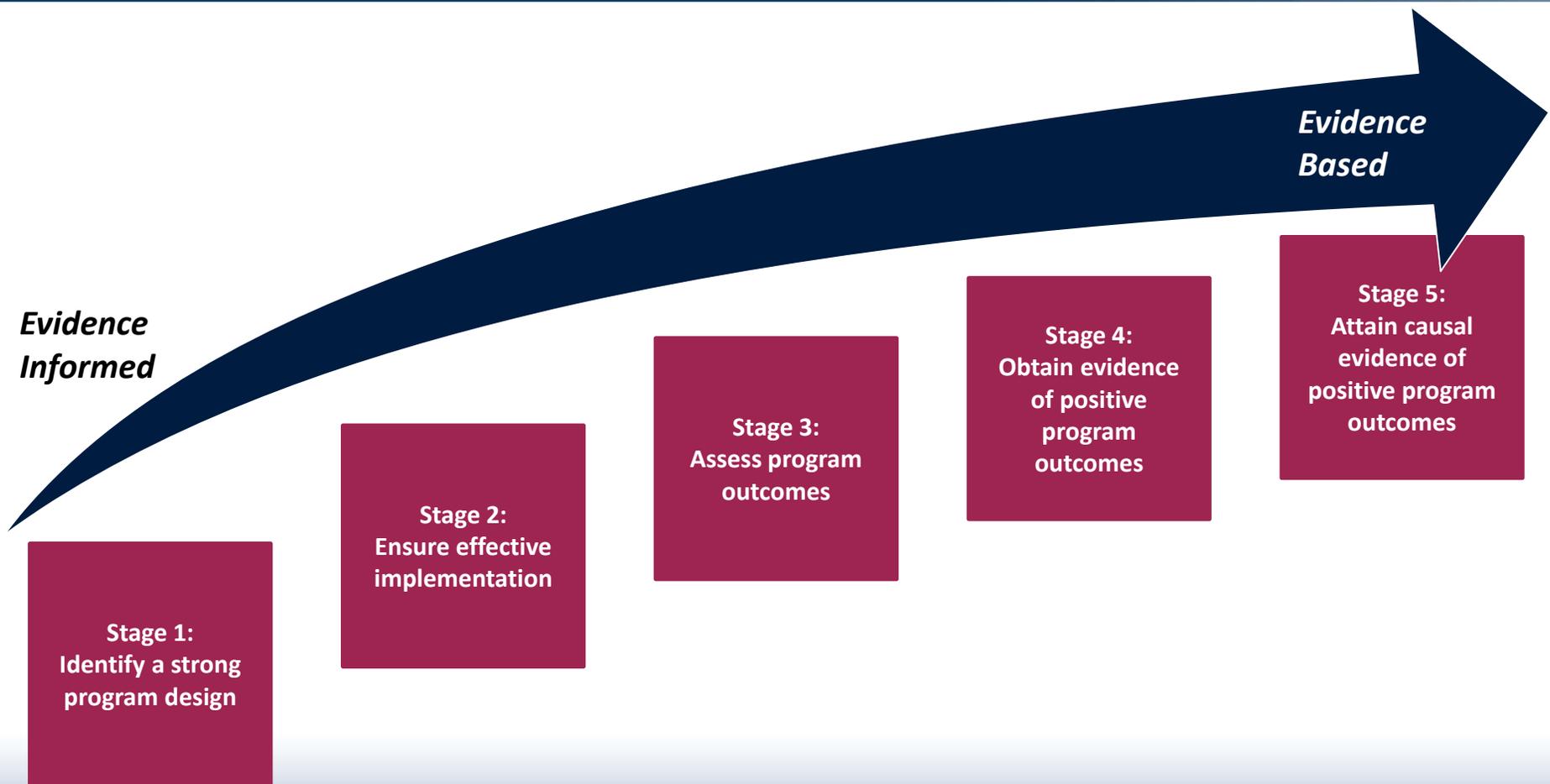
Program maturity	
Existing evidence	
Funder requirements	
Long-term program goals	
Long-term research goals	
Evaluation budget	



PART 2

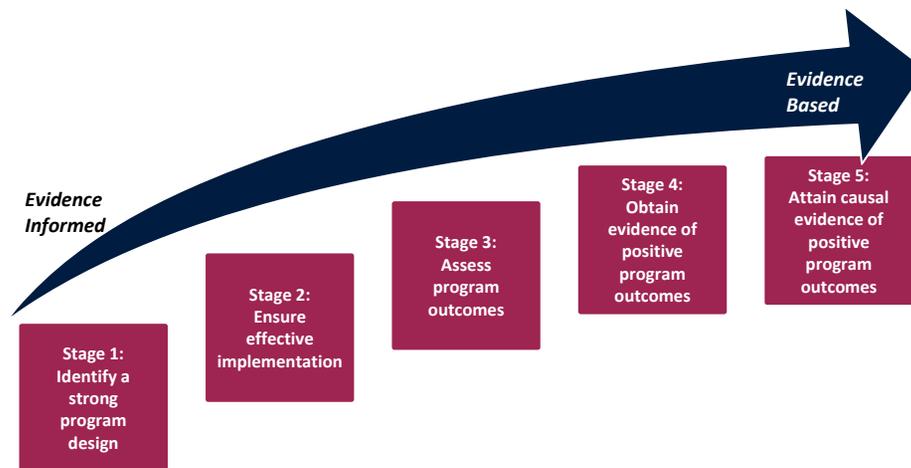
Building Evidence of Effectiveness

Building evidence of effectiveness



Stage 1: What is the program model and what is it supposed to do?

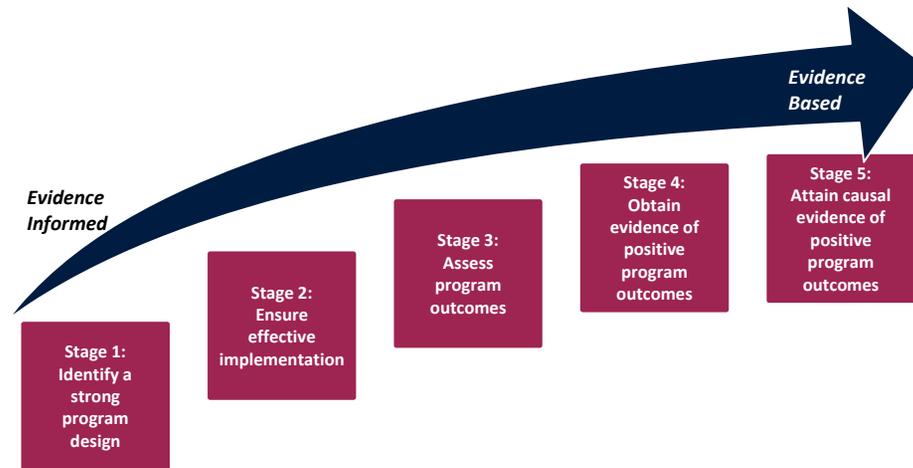
**Stage 1:
Identify a
strong
program
design**



**Gather evidence to support program design (e.g.,
conduct a literature review and/or needs assessment)
Develop logic model
Pilot program**

Stage 2: Is the program operating as envisioned?

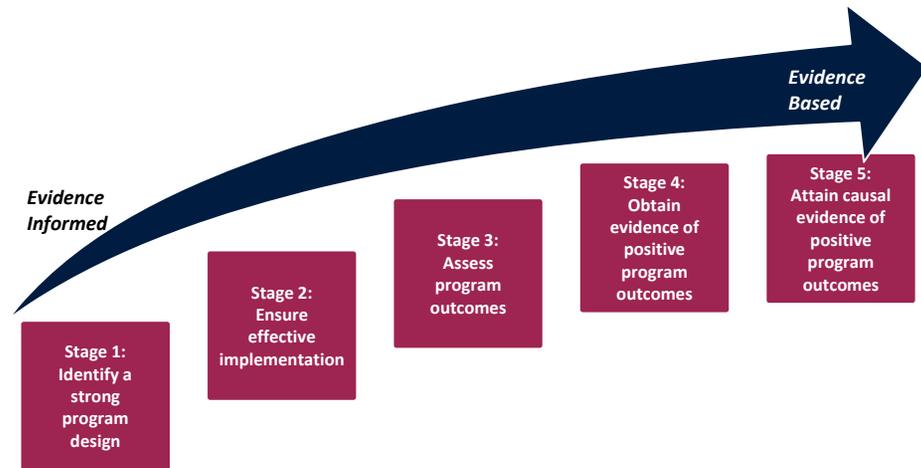
**Stage 2:
Ensure
effective
implementation**



Output performance measurement
Process evaluation

Stage 3: How well is the program working?

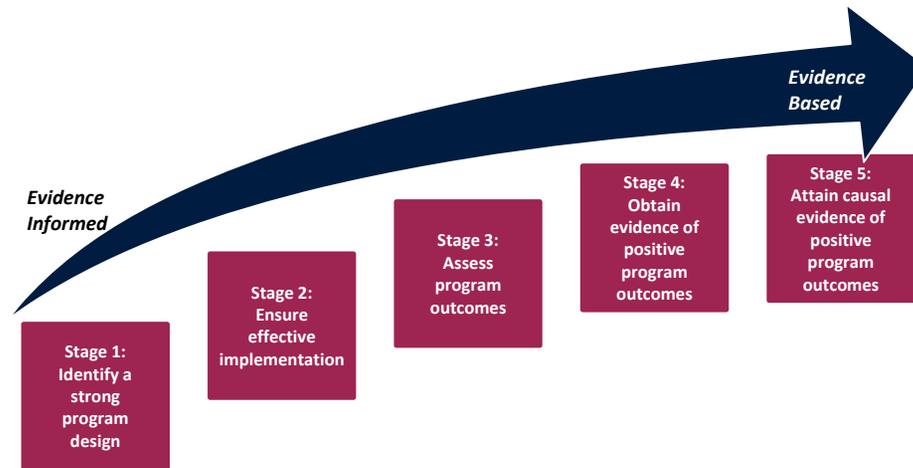
**Stage 3:
Assess
program
outcomes**



**Outcome performance measurement (e.g.,
non-experimental evaluation design)**

Stage 4: Is there evidence that the program is producing expected results?

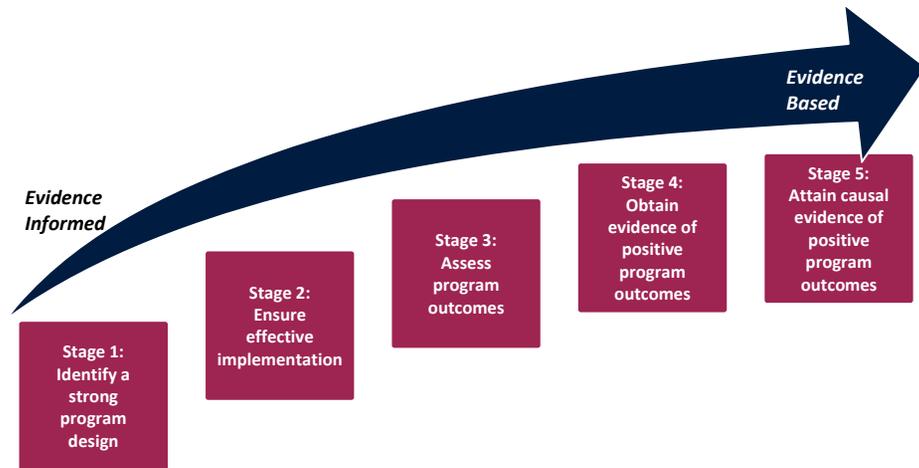
**Stage 4:
Obtain
evidence of
positive
program
outcomes**



Outcome evaluation

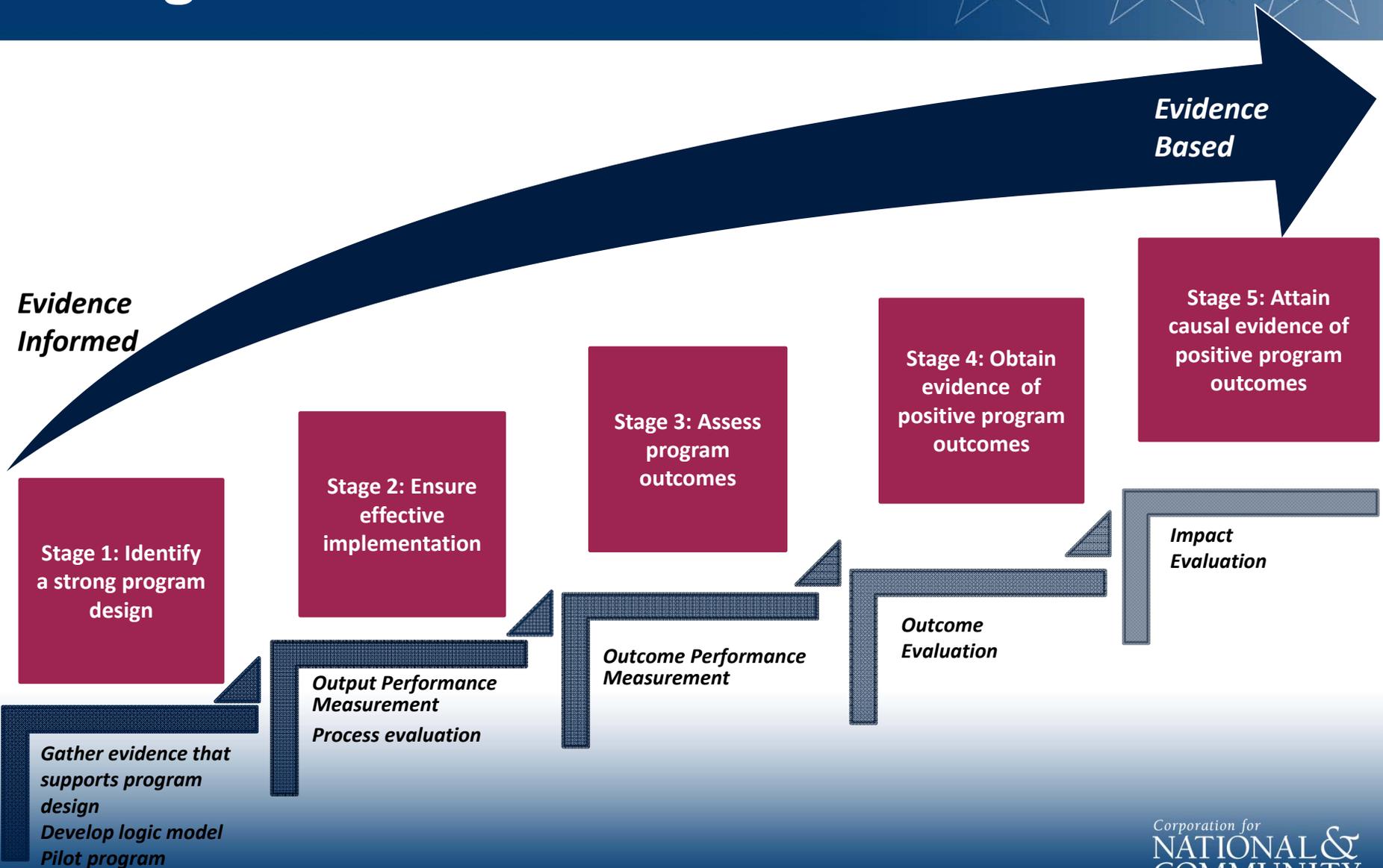
Stage 5: Is the program resulting in change?

**Stage 5:
Attain causal
evidence of
positive
program
outcomes**

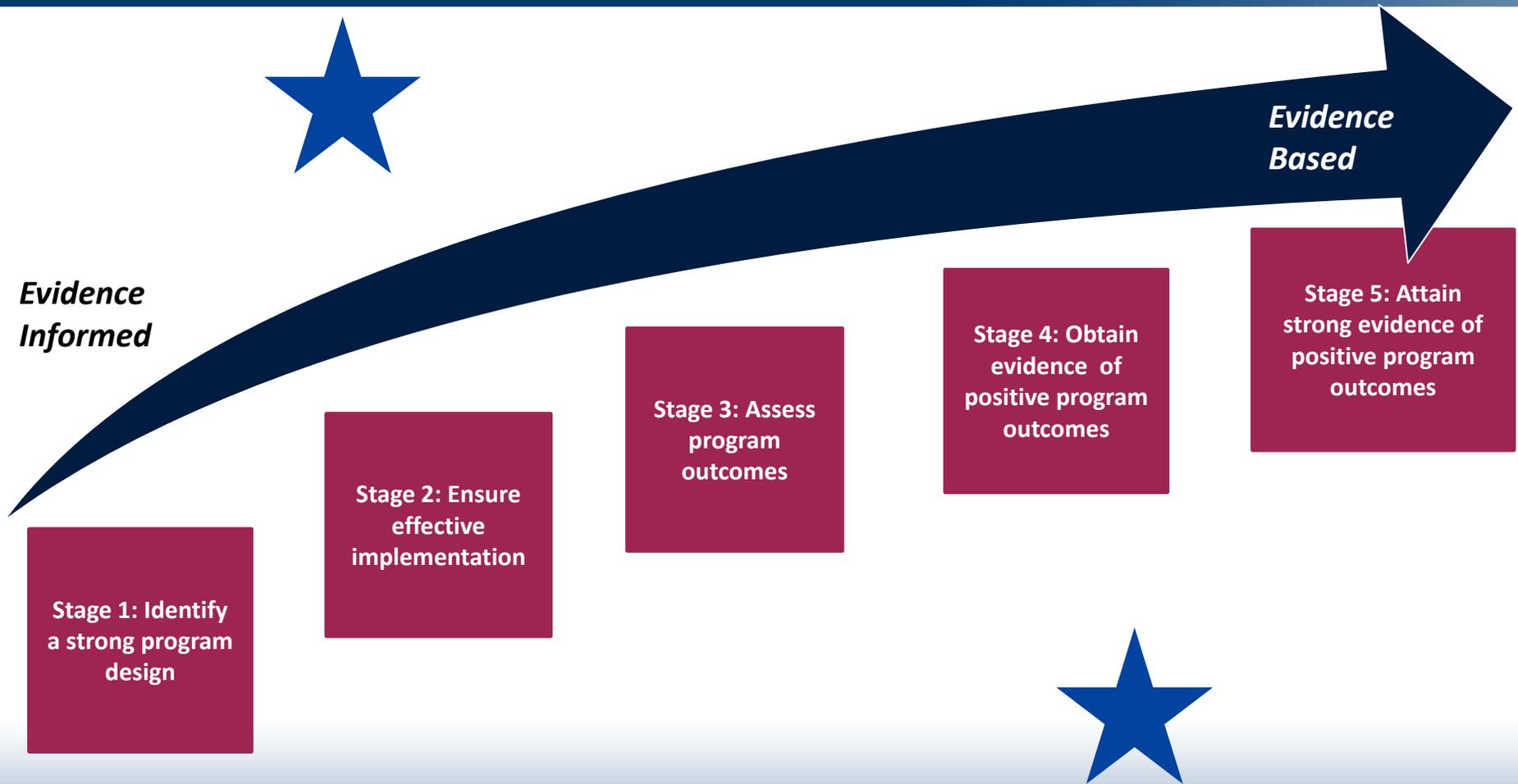


Impact evaluation (e.g., quasi-experimental design, experimental design)

Building evidence of effectiveness: Stages 1-5



Exercise Part II: Building evidence of effectiveness for your AmeriCorps program

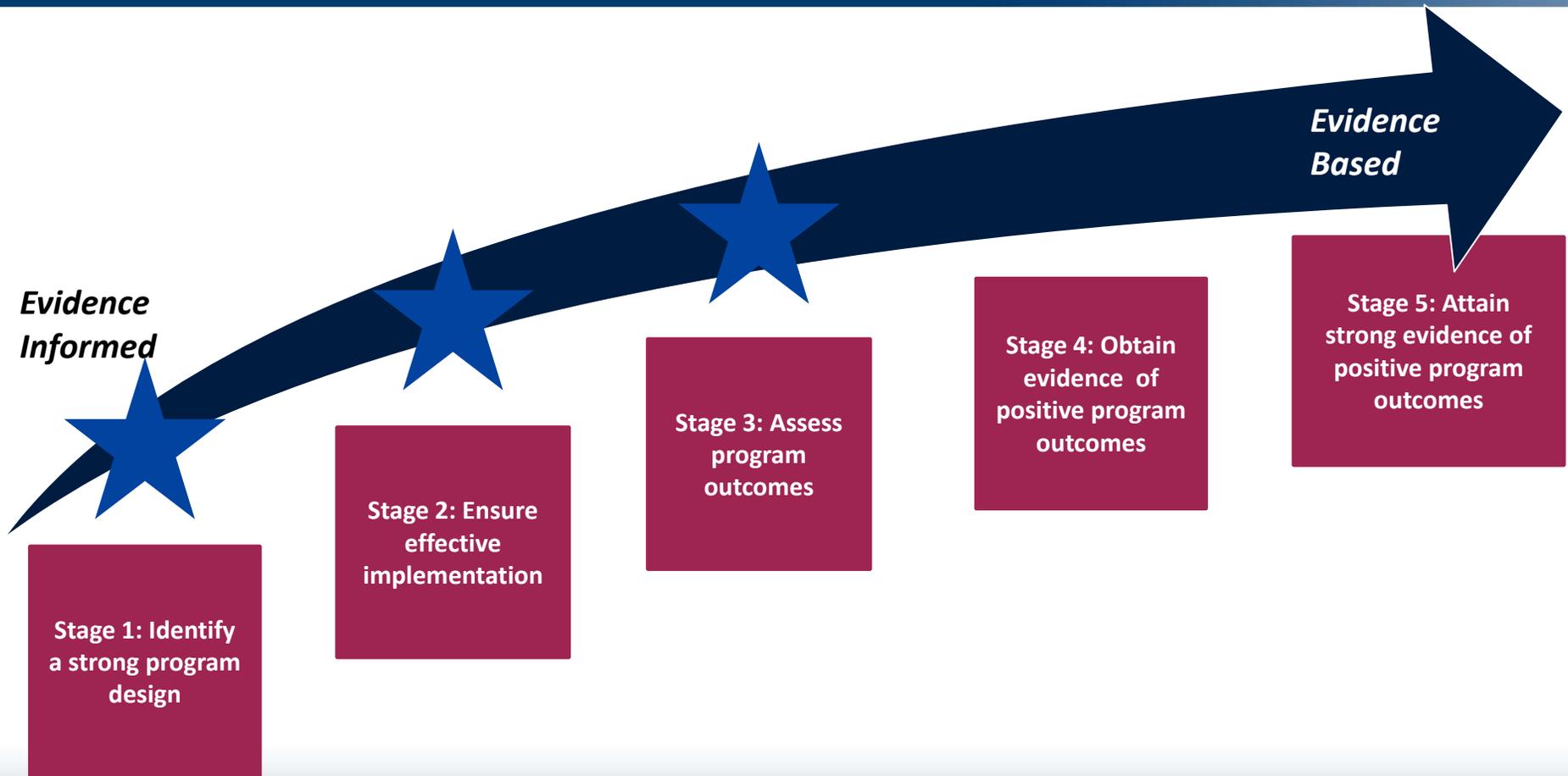




PART 3

Example Scenarios

Scenario 1: Building a long-term research agenda for a small, new program



Scenario 1: Logic model for a small, new, homelessness prevention program

Process

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	Outcomes		
			Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
What we invest	What we do	Direct products from program activities	Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions	Changes in behavior or action that result from participants' new knowledge	Meaningful changes, often in their condition or status in life
Funding 4 FT Staff 30 AmeriCorps members Training	Provide case management housing relocation and stabilization services Provide educational workshops	50 families (head of households) received case management services 50 families (head of households) attended workshops	Increase head of households' knowledge of responsible home owner or tenant practices/skills Increase head of households' knowledge of resources/services in community	Increase head of households' adoption of responsible practices/skills Decrease likelihood of foreclosures and evictions	Reduce first-time homelessness in the community

Scenario 1: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda

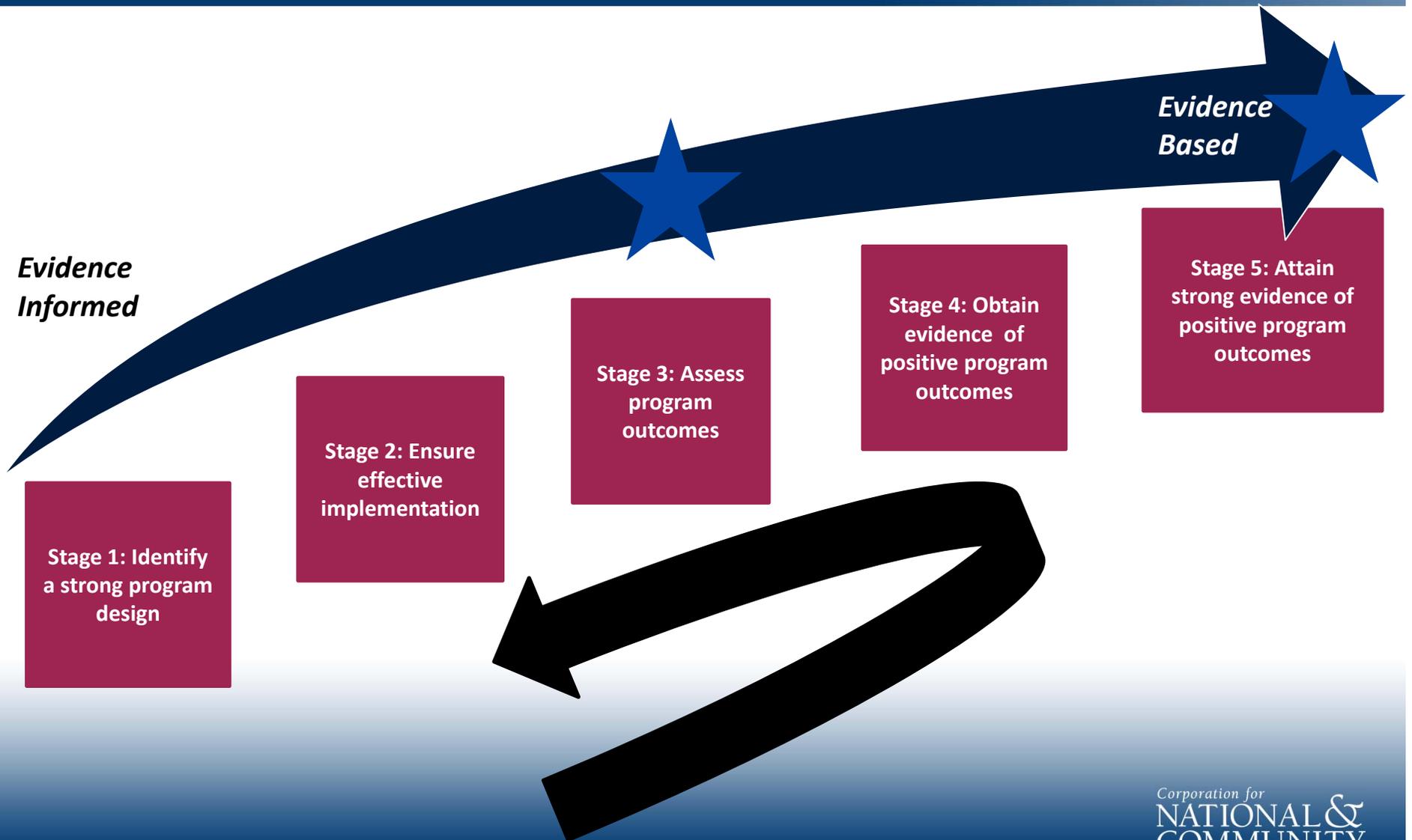
Small, new, homelessness prevention program

Program maturity	AmeriCorps grantee with no prior years of program implementation and in its first grant cycle. Operating in only one community site.
Existing evidence	The program's evidence falls in the first stage on the continuum as it has conducted a needs assessment to determine which program activities are most critical to the community it serves and a literature review to determine best practices for implementing core service activities. No evaluations have been conducted on the program.
Funder requirements	Small grantees must conduct an internal or an external program evaluation by the end of the second grant cycle. Small grantees are required to submit an evaluation report AND an evaluation plan with their recompetete application after completing two or more three-year cycles.
Long-term program goals	Achieve full program operation with efficiency and fidelity to the program's central model. Realize all expected program outcomes.
Long-term research goals	Generate data to facilitate program improvements and ensure an efficient, full operation of the program's service activities. Generate data on the program's short- and medium-term outcomes (see logic model).
Evaluation budget	10-15% of the program's annual funding has been set aside for evaluation activities.

Scenario 1: Long-term research agenda for a small, new, homelessness prevention program

Evaluation activities		Stage of evidence	Grant cycle
1	Develop a logic model and a detailed program implementation plan.	1: Identify strong program design	Pre-1
2	Create a data system to routinely collect performance measurement data and background data on program beneficiaries and AmeriCorps members. Program staff and members begin routine data collection activities.	2: Ensure effective implementation	Pre-1 and 1
3	Develop a survey to collect short-term outcome data, focusing on beneficiaries knowledge of responsible homeowner/tenant practices and knowledge of resources and services in the community. Members administer pre/post surveys to program beneficiaries and analyze data.	3: Assess program outcomes	1 and 2
4	Conduct an internal process evaluation to determine if the program is being implemented with fidelity to the central model. Make data-driven adjustments to the program's implementation as needed.	2: Ensure effective implementation	1
5	Conduct a non-experimental outcome evaluation using an external evaluator, measuring both short-term and medium-term outcomes.	3: Assess program outcomes	2

Scenario 2: Building a long-term research agenda for a large, established AmeriCorps program



Scenario 2: Example logic model for large, established, environmental restoration program

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	Outcomes		
			Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
What we invest	What we do	Direct products from program activities	Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions	Changes in behavior or action that result from participants' new knowledge	Meaningful changes, often in their condition or status in life
Funding Staff 200 AmeriCorps State and National members 200 non-AmeriCorps volunteers Research	Conduct forest enhancement and restoration Complete up-keep activities to enable native plants to survive	Install 100,000 native trees and shrubs on public land Remove 50% of invasive plant species on 10 forest sites	Increase diversity and coverage of native plant species Reduce presence of invasive plant species	Improve habitat spaces for wildlife Increase survival rate of native plant species and wildlife	Maintain conservation of healthy, productive, sustainable ecosystems

Scenario 2: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda

Large, established environmental restoration program

Program maturity	AmeriCorps grantee in its second three-year AmeriCorps grant cycle. Already operating in multiple sites and expects to add additional service sites.
Existing evidence	Established data collection processes to collect performance measurement output and outcome data. Conducted internal process evaluation yielding evidence that the program is being implemented with fidelity in most service sites.
Funder requirements	Large grantees must conduct an external impact evaluation by the end of the second grant cycle. Large grantees are required to submit an impact evaluation report AND an evaluation plan for a future evaluation with their re-compete application after completing two or more three-year cycles.
Long-term program goals	Achieve and maintain fidelity of program implementation across all existing sites and any new service sites. Build stronger evidence of effectiveness to support future requests for higher levels of funding to expand program operations.
Long-term research goals	Conduct an external impact evaluation to assess the program's short- and medium-term outcomes. Four to six years is the minimum amount of time for program outcomes to be realized . For this reason, the grantee will submit a request for an alternative evaluation approach for timing considerations.
Evaluation budget	15% of the grantee's annual funding has been set aside for evaluation activities. Grantee is seeking additional outside funding for the impact evaluation.

Scenario 2: Long-term research agenda for large, established environmental restoration program

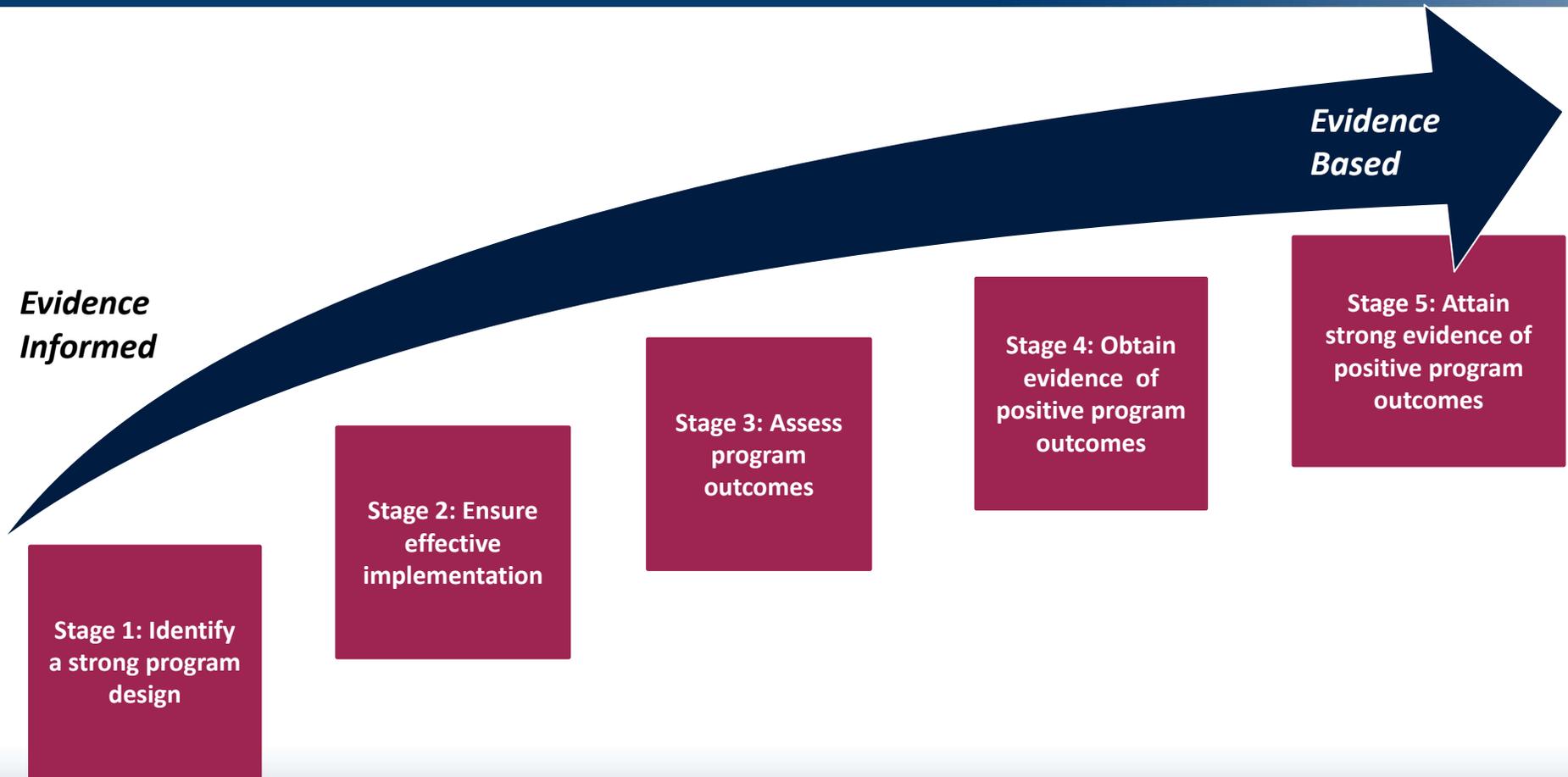
	Evaluation activities	Stage of evidence	Grant cycle
1	Conduct a quasi-experimental design (QED) study using an external evaluator, measuring all short- and medium-term outcomes over a six-year time frame and relative to a matched comparison group of sites (i.e., adjacent non-serviced areas that are similar to the pre-restoration conditions at the treatment sites).	5: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes	2+3
2	Continue to collect and analyze output and outcome performance measurement data on an annual basis.	3: Assess program outcomes	2, 3, 4, etc.
3	Conduct an internal process evaluation focusing on new service sites to determine if the program's new restoration projects are being implemented with fidelity to the central model. Make data-driven adjustments to the program's implementation as needed.	2: Ensure effective implementation	2



PART 4

Exercise

Exercise: Building evidence of effectiveness for your AmeriCorps program



Exercise Part I: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda for your AmeriCorps program

Your AmeriCorps program

Program maturity	
Existing evidence	
Funder requirements	
Long-term program goals	
Long-term research goals	
Evaluation budget	

Exercise Part II: Building evidence of effectiveness for your AmeriCorps program



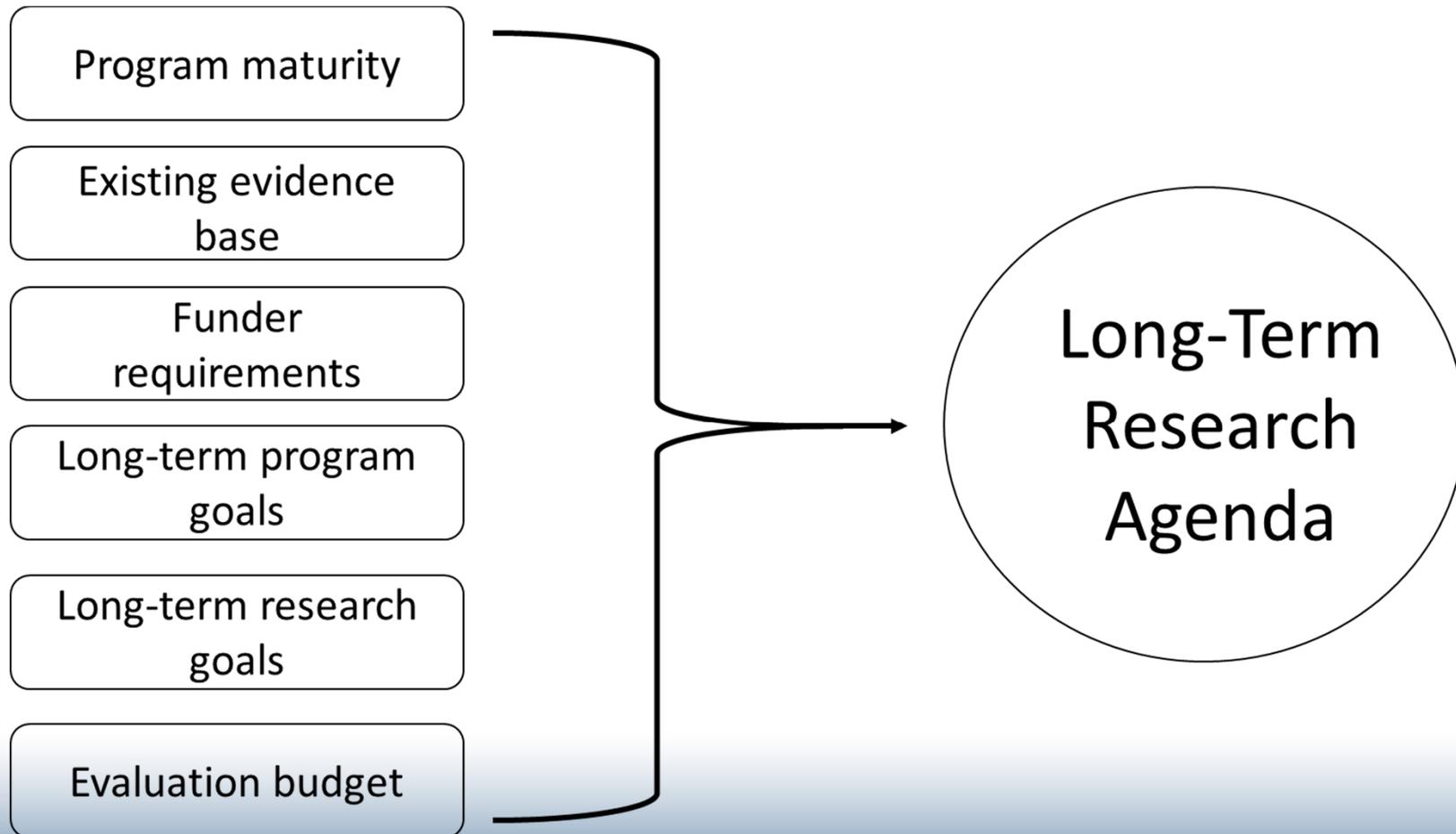
Exercise Part III: Long-term research agenda for your AmeriCorps program

	Evaluation activities	Stage of evidence	Grant cycle
1			
2			
3			
4			

Important points to remember

- A long-term research agenda is a developmental approach to evaluation whereby evidence of effectiveness is built over time.
- A long-term research agenda is unique and should be tailored to fit each individual program.
- There is value to building evidence at all stages along the continuum.
- A long-term research agenda should reflect an iterative process where evidence is built gradually over time.

Key points to consider when developing a long-term research agenda



Evaluation Resources Page

COMMUNITY SERVICE

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Resources

- AmeriCorps
- Capacity Building
- Criminal History Check
- Disability Inclusion
- Disaster Services
- Economic Opportunity
- Education
- Education Award
- Environmental Stewardship
- Evaluation**
- Financial Management
- Healthy Futures
- Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster (eCourse)
- Marketing and Media
- Member & Volunteer Development
- Online Courses
- Performance Measurement
- Recruitment
- Senior Corps
- Uniform Guidance
- Veterans & Military Families

Evaluation Resources

Evaluation is the use of social science research methods to assess a program's design, implementation, and effectiveness. It is a tool that helps programs continuously improve their work and demonstrate what they are accomplishing in communities. Evaluation gives programs an opportunity to test their interventions, adjust services to best meet community needs, and collect data to support their work. Evaluation is more than a funder's requirement; it is a powerful tool for improving a program and increasing its ability to serve people more efficiently and effectively.

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graph TD; Planning --> Implementation; Implementation --> Analysis[Analysis and Reporting]; Analysis --> Results[Using Evaluation Results for Action and Improvement]; Results --> Planning;
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Explore Resources

CNCs has created a number of resources to assist your program as it moves through each stage of the evaluation process. Explore resources related to:

- Planning
- Implementation
- Analysis and Reporting
- Using Evaluation Results for Action and Improvement

Featured Resources

- How to Write an Evaluation Plan
- Budgeting for Evaluation
- Managing an External Evaluation

Resources are available to learn about the evidence continuum and how to determine your program's level of evidence.

You can also learn more about CNCs' Evaluation Policies, including details about evaluation requirements.

Find Resources

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Resource Type:

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Resources

- **CNCS's Resources**

- <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/amicorps/evaluation-resources-amicorps-state-national-grantees>

- **The American Evaluation Association**

- <http://www.eval.org>

- **The Evaluation Center**

- <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/>

- **National Science Foundation**

- http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057_4.pdf

Questions?

