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.
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).

- Process study
- Collect routine program data
- Collect routine program data
- Collect routine program data
- Collect routine program data
- Collect routine program data

Randomized control trial (RCT)

Long term outcome data via follow-up survey

Pre/post outcome data via survey

Pre/post outcome data via survey

Pre/post outcome data via survey
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your AmeriCorps program</th>
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<td>Existing evidence</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term program goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term research goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation budget</td>
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PART 2
Building Evidence of Effectiveness
Building evidence of effectiveness

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design
Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation
Stage 3: Assess program outcomes
Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes
Stage 5: Attain causal evidence of positive program outcomes

Evidence Informed
Evidence Based
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

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design
Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation
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Stage 5: Attain causal 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

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design
- Gather evidence that supports program design
- Develop logic model
- Pilot program

Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation
- Output Performance Measurement
- Process evaluation

Stage 3: Assess program outcomes
- Outcome Performance Measurement

Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes
- Outcome Evaluation

Stage 5: Attain causal evidence of positive program outcomes

Evidence Informed
Evidence Based
Impact Evaluation
Exercise Part II: Building evidence of effectiveness for your AmeriCorps program

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design
Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation
Stage 3: Assess program outcomes
Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes
Stage 5: Attain strong evidence of positive program outcomes

Evidence Informed
Evidence Based
PART 3
Example Scenarios
Scenario 1: Building a long-term research agenda for a small, new program

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design
Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation
Stage 3: Assess program outcomes
Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes
Stage 5: Attain strong evidence of positive program outcomes
### Scenario 1: Logic model for a small, new, homelessness prevention program

#### Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INPUTS</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>OUTPUTS</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What we invest</td>
<td>What we do</td>
<td>Direct products from program activities</td>
<td>Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Provide case management housing relocation and stabilization services</td>
<td>50 families (head of households) received case management services</td>
<td>Increase head of households’ knowledge of responsible home owner or tenant practices/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FT Staff</td>
<td>Provide educational workshops</td>
<td>50 families (head of households) attended workshops</td>
<td>Increase head of households’ knowledge of responsible practices/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 AmeriCorps members</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase head of households’ knowledge of resources/services in community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short-Term</th>
<th>Medium-Term</th>
<th>Long-Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes in behavior or action that result from participants’ new knowledge</td>
<td>Meaningful changes, often in their condition or status in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease likelihood of foreclosures and evictions</td>
<td>Reduce first-time homelessness in the community</td>
</tr>
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- **Short-Term**
  - Funding:
    - Provide case management housing relocation and stabilization services
    - Provide educational workshops
  - Activities:
    - Provide case management housing relocation and stabilization services
    - Provide educational workshops
  - Outputs:
    - 50 families (head of households) received case management services
    - 50 families (head of households) attended workshops

- **Medium-Term**
  - Increase head of households’ knowledge of responsible home owner or tenant practices/skills
  - Increase head of households’ knowledge of resources/services in community

- **Long-Term**
  - Reduce first-time homelessness in the community
### Scenario 1: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda

<table>
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<th><strong>Small, new, homelessness prevention program</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Program maturity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Existing evidence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Funder requirements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term program goals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term research goals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation budget</strong></td>
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### Scenario 1: Long-term research agenda for a small, new, homelessness prevention program

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Stage of evidence</th>
<th>Grant cycle</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop a logic model and a detailed program implementation plan.</td>
<td>1: Identify strong program design</td>
<td>Pre-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>2: Ensure effective implementation</td>
<td>Pre-1 and 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>3: Assess program outcomes</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>2: Ensure effective implementation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conduct a non-experimental outcome evaluation using an external evaluator, measuring both short-term and medium-term outcomes.</td>
<td>3: Assess program outcomes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scenario 2: Building a long-term research agenda for a large, established AmeriCorps program

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design

Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation

Stage 3: Assess program outcomes

Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes

Stage 5: Attain strong evidence of positive program outcomes
### Scenario 2: Example logic model for large, established, environmental restoration program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INPUTS</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>OUTPUTS</th>
<th>Short-Term</th>
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<th>Long-Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>What we invest</td>
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<td>Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions</td>
<td>Changes in behavior or action that result from participants’ new knowledge</td>
<td>Meaningful changes, often in their condition or status in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Conduct forest enhancement and restoration</td>
<td>Install 100,000 native trees and shrubs on public land</td>
<td>Increase diversity and coverage of native plant species</td>
<td>Improve habitat spaces for wildlife</td>
<td>Maintain conservation of healthy, productive, sustainable ecosystems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff 200</td>
<td>Complete up- keep activities to enable native plants to survive</td>
<td>Remove 50% of invasive plant species on 10 forest sites</td>
<td>Reduce presence of invasive plant species</td>
<td>Increase survival rate of native plant species and wildlife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 AmeriCorps State and National members</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>200 non- AmeriCorps volunteers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
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Scenario 2: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda

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

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<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Stage of evidence</th>
<th>Grant cycle</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> 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).</td>
<td>5: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes</td>
<td>2+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong> Continue to collect and analyze output and outcome performance measurement data on an annual basis.</td>
<td>3: Assess program outcomes</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> 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.</td>
<td>2: Ensure effective implementation</td>
<td>2</td>
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PART 4
Exercise
Exercise: Building evidence of effectiveness for your AmeriCorps program

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design

Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation

Stage 3: Assess program outcomes

Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes

Stage 5: Attain strong evidence of positive program outcomes

Evidence Based

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

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

Stage 1: Identify a strong program design

Stage 2: Ensure effective implementation

Stage 3: Assess program outcomes

Stage 4: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes

Stage 5: Attain strong evidence of positive program outcomes
Exercise Part III: Long-term research agenda for your AmeriCorps program

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
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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

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

Long-Term Research Agenda
Evaluation Resources

Evaluation is the use of social science research methods to assess a program’s design, implementation, and effectiveness. It is used to tell whether programs continue to improve their work and determine what they are accomplishing in communities. Evaluation can provide an opportunity to feed their interventions, adjust services to better 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 various groups efficiently and effectively.

Explore Resources

CNCS has created a range of resources to assist you in designing and implementing your program. 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 the program’s level of evidence.

You can also learn more about CNCS’ Evaluation Policies, including details about evaluation requirements.
Resources

• CNCS’s Resources

• The American Evaluation Association
  – http://www.eval.org

• The Evaluation Center
  – http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/

• National Science Foundation
Questions?