



Research Questions

Adrienne DiTommaso, MPA, CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation



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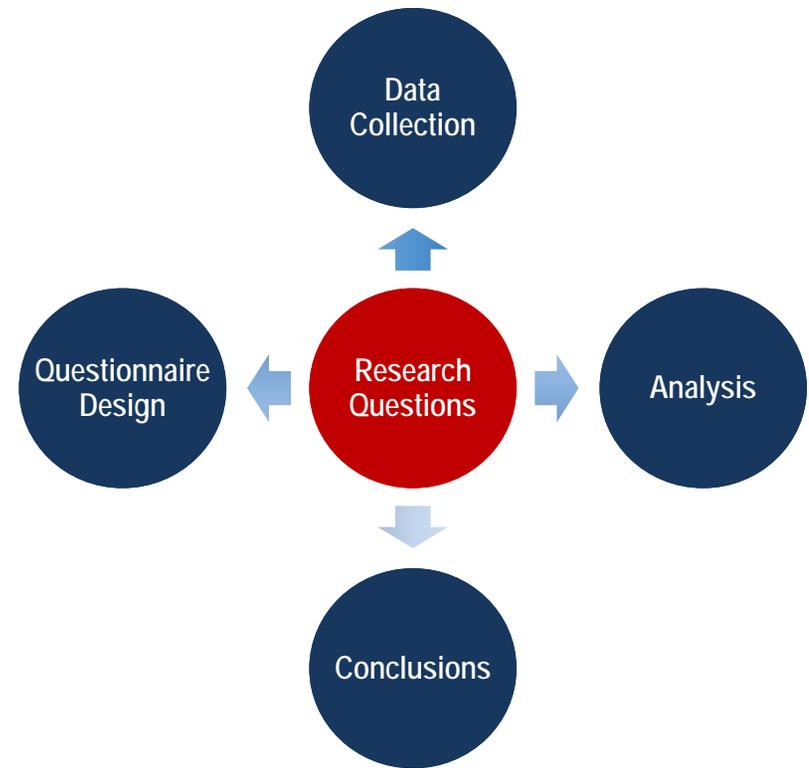
Learning objectives

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

- Understand the importance of research questions
- Understand the four basic steps for developing research questions
- Write research questions for different types of evaluation designs (i.e., process evaluation and outcome evaluation)

Why are research questions important?

- Foundation of a successful evaluation
- Define the topics the evaluation will investigate
- Guide the evaluation planning process
- Provide structure to evaluation activities

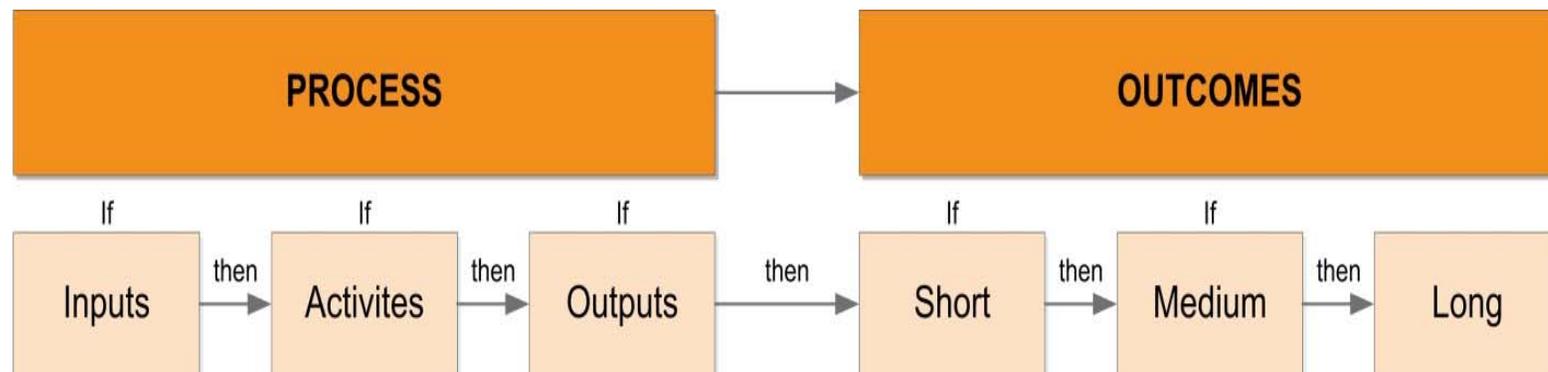


Steps for developing research questions

- Step 1: Develop a logic model to clarify program design and theory of change
- Step 2: Define the evaluation's purpose and scope
- Step 3: Determine the type of evaluation design - process or outcome
- Step 4: Draft and finalize evaluation's research questions

Step 1: Develop a logic model to clarify the program design

- A logic model is a graphic “snapshot” of how a program works (its theory of change); it communicates the intended relationships among program components.



- Research questions should test some aspect of the program’s theory of change as depicted in a logic model.

Step 2: Define the evaluation's purpose and scope

As you define the evaluation's purpose and scope, the following questions should be considered:

- Why is the evaluation being done? What information do stakeholders need or hope to gain from the evaluation?
- What requirements does the evaluation need to fulfill?
- Which components of the program are the strongest candidates for evaluation?
- How does the evaluation align with the long-term research agenda for your program?
- What resources (budget, staff, time) are available for the evaluation?

Step 3: Determine type of evaluation

Process Evaluation

- Goal is generally to inform changes or improvements in the program's operations
- Documents what the program is doing and to what extent and how consistently the program has been implemented as intended
- Does not require a comparison group
- Includes qualitative and quantitative data collection

Outcome Evaluation

- Goal is to identify the results or effects of a program
- Measures program beneficiaries' changes in knowledge, attitude(s), behavior(s), and/or condition(s) that result from a program
- May include a comparison group (impact evaluation)
- Typically require quantitative data and advanced statistical methods

Step 4: Draft and finalize evaluation's research questions

Research questions should be:



Clear, specific, and well-defined



Focus on a program or program component



Measurable by the evaluation



Aligned with your logic model

Step 4: Draft and finalize evaluation's research questions

Consider the following:

- Do the research question(s) fit with the goals for the evaluation?
- Do the research question(s) align with the program's logic model and the components of the program that will be evaluated?
- Are these questions aligned with your funder's requirements?
- What kinds of constraints (costs, time, personnel, etc.) are likely to be encountered in addressing these research question(s)?
- Do the research questions fit into the program's long-term research agenda?

Basic principles in designing research questions

Differences in research questions for process and outcome evaluations:

Research questions for *process-focused evaluations* ask:

Who?
What?
When?
Where?
Why?
How?



About:

Inputs/resources
Program activities
Outputs
Stakeholder views

Research questions for *outcome-focused evaluations* ask about:

Changes?
Effects?
Impacts?



In:

(Short-term)	(Medium-term)	(Long-term)
Knowledge	Behaviors	Conditions
Skills	Actions	Status
Attitudes		
Opinions		



Basic principles in designing research questions for a process evaluation

Research questions for a process evaluation should:

- Focus on the program or a program component
- Ask who, what, where, when, why, or how?
- Use exploratory verbs, such as report, describe, discover, seek, or explore

Examples:

- How is the program being implemented?
- How do program beneficiaries describe their program experiences?
- What resources are being described as needed for implementing the program?

Examples of research questions for a process evaluation

Broad	to	More Specific
<p>How is the program being implemented?</p>		<p>Are staff implementing the program within the same timeframe?</p>
		<p>Are staff implementing the program with the same intended target population?</p>
		<p>What variations in implementation, if any, occur by site? Why are variations occurring? Are they likely to effect program outcomes?</p>
		<p>Are there unique challenges to implementing the program by site?</p>



Examples of research questions for a process evaluation

Broad	to	More Specific
How do program beneficiaries describe their program experiences?	➔	<p>What are the benefits for program beneficiaries?</p> <p>Are there any unintended consequences of program participation?</p>
What resources are being described as needed for implementing the program?	➔	<p>What recommendations do program staff offer for future program implementers?</p>



Exercise for process evaluation research questions

Create a few process evaluation research questions for your program!

- Create 2-3 process questions in the process section of your handout
- Share with your neighbor and get feedback! Discuss:
 - What part of your program is being evaluated?
 - What are you trying to measure with this question?
 - Could your question be more clear, specific, and/or well defined?



Clear, specific, and well-defined



Focus on a program or program component



Measurable by the evaluation



Aligned with your logic model

Basic principles in designing research questions for an outcome evaluation

Research questions for an outcome evaluation should:

- Be direct and specific as to the theory or assumption being tested (i.e., program effectiveness or impact)
- Examine changes, effects, or impacts
- Specify the outcome(s) to be measured

Examples:

- Did program beneficiaries change their (knowledge, attitude, behavior, or condition) after program completion?
- Did all types of program beneficiaries benefit from the program or only specific subgroups?
- Are there differences in outcomes for program participants compared to those not in the program?

Exercise for process evaluation research questions

Create a few outcome evaluation research questions for your program!

- Create 2-3 outcome questions in the process section of your handout
- Share with your neighbor and get feedback! Discuss:
 - What part of your program is being evaluated?
 - What are you trying to measure with this question?
 - Could your question be more clear, specific, and/or well defined?



Clear, specific, and well-defined



Focus on a program or program component



Measurable by the evaluation



Aligned with your logic model

Important points to remember

- Research questions are the keystone in an evaluation from which all other activities evolve
- Prior to developing research questions, define the evaluation's purpose and scope and decide the type of evaluation design (process or outcome) since research questions will vary depending on the evaluation design
- Research questions should be clear, specific, and well-defined
- Research questions should be developed in consideration of your long-term research agenda

Questions?

