Using Evaluation Results and Building a Long-Term Research Agenda

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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
- Understand the importance of communicating and disseminating evaluation results to stakeholders
- Determine meaningful programmatic changes based on evaluation findings, and learn how to implement them
Workshop overview

• Part 1: Building a long-term research agenda
• Part 2: Evidence continuum
• Part 3: Scenarios
• Part 4: Using evaluation results
• Part 5: Q&A
PART 1

Building 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. [1st or 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
- Pre/post outcome data via survey
- Pre/post outcome data via survey
- Pre/post outcome data via survey
- Long term outcome data via follow-up survey
- Long term outcome data via follow-up survey
- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your AmeriCorps program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program maturity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing evidence</strong></td>
</tr>
<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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PART 2
Evidence Continuum: 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 continuum
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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INPUTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we invest</td>
<td>What we do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding 4 FT Staff</td>
<td>Provide case management housing relocation and stabilization services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 AmeriCorps members</td>
<td>Provide educational workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scenario 1: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Stage of evidence</th>
<th>Grant cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What we invest</td>
<td>Direct products from program activities</td>
<td>Short-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What we do</td>
<td>Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions</td>
<td>Medium-Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What we invest</td>
<td>Changes in behavior or action that result from participants’ new knowledge</td>
<td>Long-Term</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>Meaningful changes, often in their condition or status in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</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>Increase diversity and coverage of native plant species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce presence of invasive plant species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase survival rate of native plant species and wildlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintain conservation of healthy, productive, sustainable ecosystems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 non-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AmeriCorps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
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Scenario 2: Key considerations in developing a long-term research agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large, established environmental restoration program</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program maturity</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Existing evidence</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Funder requirements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term program goals</strong></td>
</tr>
<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 2: Long-term research agenda for large, established environmental restoration program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Stage of evidence</th>
<th>Grant cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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).</td>
<td>5: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes</td>
<td>2+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 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>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.</td>
<td>2: Ensure effective implementation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise Part III: Long-term research agenda for your AmeriCorps program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation activities</th>
<th>Stage of evidence</th>
<th>Grant cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<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
PART 4
Using Evaluation Results
Finish the evaluation process by using results for improvement

- Planning
- Implementation
- Analysis and Reporting
- Action and Improvement
Using evaluation results for action and improvement

• You’ve completed your evaluation report, but what do the results mean in practice? How do these results translate into actions?

• Take your findings and make them actionable!
  – Identify program components that are working well
  – Identify program components that need to be improved
  – Develop and implement an action plan for improvement
Identify program components to be improved

• Pair results to the relevant research question:
  – Did anything surprise you?
  – Any interesting or confusing patterns and trends?
  – Revisit logic model and theory of change
  – Conduct additional analyses of the data if necessary

• Decide whether or not enough evidence exists to justify a program improvement

• Suggest possible improvements, actions, or changes
Developing and implementing an action plan for program improvement

• Develop an action plan for implementing change
  – Changes may include: The program design; how a program is implemented; how services are delivered; the staff, etc.

• Specify the logistics
  – Who will carry out these improvements?
  – By when they will take place, and for how long?
  – What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes?
  – Who can be an advocate or partner in change?
Thinking about the future

Evaluations pay dividends long after they are completed. An evaluation will:

- Build your program’s evidence base
- Contribute to a long term research agenda
- Facilitate continuous improvement and develop as a learning organization
Facilitated Example: Using results of an impact evaluation

Positive RCT findings: clients improve compared to comparison group

Consult document review, performance measures data

Compare results to logic model, theory of change to determine improvements

Plan for and enact improvements
Facilitated Example: Using results of an impact evaluation

Positive RCT findings: clients improve compared to comparison group

Consult document review, performance measures data

Compare results to logic model, theory of change to determine improvements

Plan for and enact improvements

Positive, significant difference between treatment and control group

Clients are making progress in solving financial problem

6 mos. post program
Facilitated Example: Using results of an impact evaluation

Positive RCT findings: clients improve compared to comparison group

Consult document review, performance measures data

Compare results to logic model, theory of change to determine improvements

Plan for and enact improvements

Member activity logs show high level of consistency in type, duration, and quantity of service being provided by members

Findings triangulated with performance measures data
Facilitated Example: Using results of an impact evaluation

Positive RCT findings: clients improve compared to comparison group

Consult document review, performance measures data

Compare results to logic model, theory of change to determine improvements

Plan for and enact improvements

Findings align with program as described in logic model and theory of change
Facilitated Example: Using results of an impact evaluation

Positive RCT findings: clients improve compared to comparison group

Consult document review, performance measures data

Compare results to logic model, theory of change to determine improvements

Plan for and enact improvements

All site training day

Enhance dissemination plan

Think about next evaluation: fidelity study
Facilitated Example: Using results of an impact evaluation

Positive RCT findings: clients improve compared to comparison group → Consult document review, performance measures data → Compare results to logic model, theory of change to determine improvements → Plan for and enact improvements

Continuous improvement ↔ Increase evidence base ↔ Serve more people, better
Go to the National Service Knowledge Network evaluation page for more information:
http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation

Other courses available:
- How to Develop a Program Logic Model
- Overview of Evaluation Designs
- How to Write an Evaluation Plan
- Budgeting for Evaluation
- Data Collection for Evaluation
- Managing an External Evaluation
- And more!
Evaluation resources page