

**HOW TO DEVELOP
RESEARCH QUESTIONS
FOR PROGRAM
EVALUATION**

RESEARCH QUESTION → HYPOTHESIS

Research Question

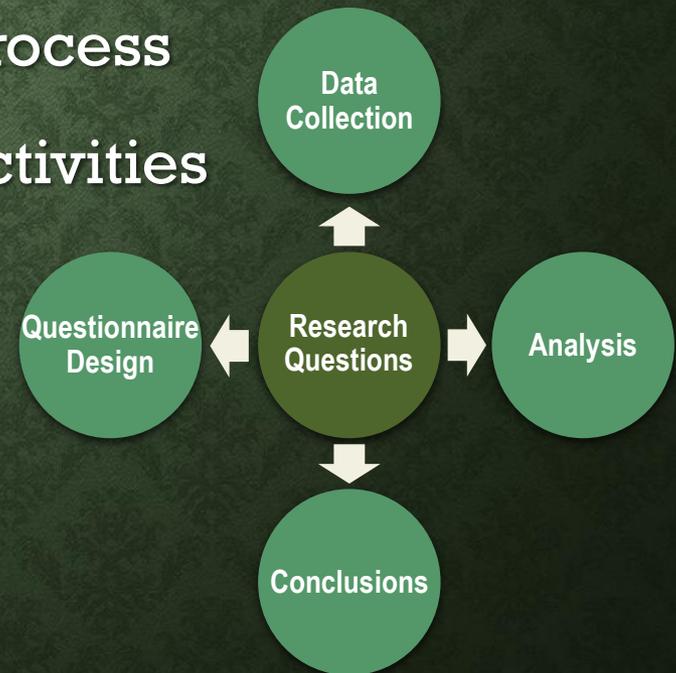
- Inquisitive
- Open-ended
 - Ex: “What differences exist in human eye blinking behavior?”

Hypothesis

- Predictive statements
 - “Males will blink more frequently than females”
- Testable
 - Count the number of blinks over a two minute period

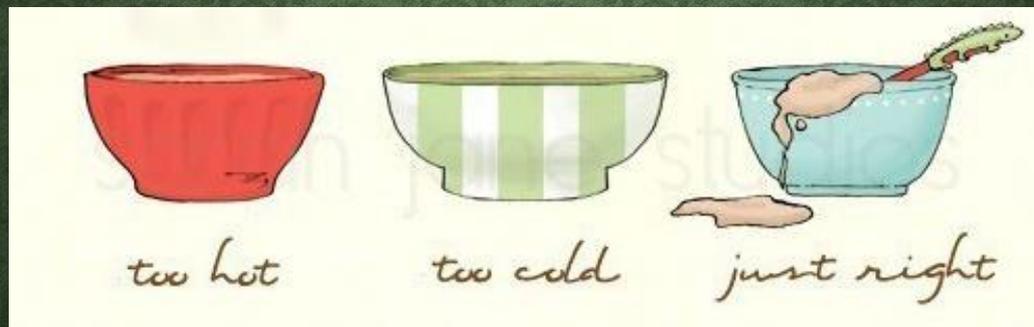
WHY ARE RESEARCH QUESTIONS IMPORTANT?

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



THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Keep RQs broad enough to encapsulate your work, but narrow enough to keep you contained



- Need to have everyone in agreement
 - Collaborative effort
 - Who should be in the room? Leadership, stakeholders, staff...anyone who would be involved

REVISING YOUR RESEARCH QUESTION

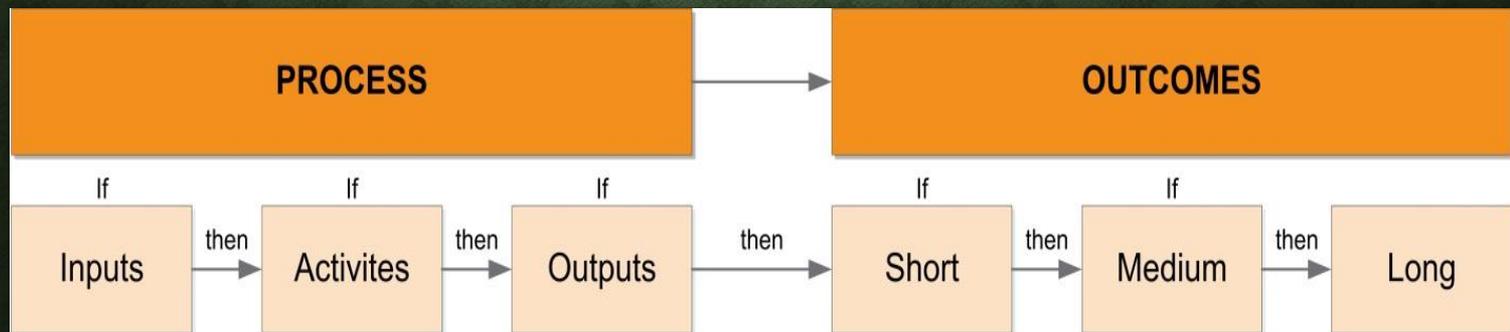
- Some questions need narrowing
 - “What impact do after school programs have on students?”



- Some questions need broadening
 - “How does cyberbullying affect attrition rates among teens in rural high schools?”

DEVELOP A LOGIC MODEL TO CLARIFY THE PROGRAM DESIGN

- A logic model is a graphic “snapshot” of how a program works
 - It communicates the intended relationships among program components.
- Research questions should test some aspect of the program’s theory of change



EXAMPLE LOGIC MODEL FOR HEALTH LITERACY 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 4 FT staff AmeriCorps members serve as health care advisors Partnerships with community-based organizations Member training	Develop and disseminate accurate, accessible, and actionable health and safety information Conduct health literacy workshops Provide individualized health literacy sessions	500 health and safety education materials disseminated 4 half-day workshop sessions (at least 20 residents per session; 80 total) 100 individual and small group health literacy sessions (60 mins each) serving 300 people	Increase in residents' understanding of prevention and self-management of conditions Increase in residents' motivation to adopt good health practices Increase in residents ability to search for and use health information	Increase in residents' adoption of healthy behaviors and recommendations of the program (such as getting necessary medical tests)	Improved health and wellness status and quality of life for residents in the area

DETERMINE TYPE OF EVALUATION

Process Evaluation

- Goal is to inform changes or improvements in the program's operations
- Documents what the program is doing, and if it was 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 changes in knowledge, attitude(s), behavior(s) and/or condition(s)
- May include a comparison group (impact evaluation)
- Typically require quantitative data and statistical methods

DRAFT THE EVALUATION'S RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Research questions are a list of questions to be answered at the end of the evaluation.

They should be:

- Clear, specific, and well-defined
- Focus on a program or program component
- Measureable by the evaluation
- Aligned with your logic model

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?

DESIGNING RQS 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

TEMPLATE FOR DEVELOPING RQS: PROCESS EVALUATION

- *[who/what/where/when/why/how] is the [program/model/component] for [evaluation purpose]?*
- **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 exist? 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?		What are the benefits for program beneficiaries? Are there any unintended consequences of program participation?
What resources are being described as needed for implementing the program?		What recommendations do program staff offer for future program implementers?

DESIGNING RQS FOR AN OUTCOME EVALUATION

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

DEVELOPING RQS FOR OUTCOME EVALUATION

- **Did** *[model, program, program component]* **have** *a [change, effect] on [outcome(s)]* **for** *[individuals, groups, or organizations]*?
- **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?

PRACTICE TIME!

- We're going to critique some research questions for the health literacy logic model
- Two steps
 - 1. Identify what is wrong with the question
 - 2. Make a suggestion for how to fix it

Process RQs

- Are all AmeriCorps members engaged in delivering health literacy activities?
- Are program participants more likely to adopt preventive health practices than non-participants?

Outcome RQs

- Are program participants more likely to adopt healthy behaviors?
- Did workshops result in greater investment in health literacy?

PROCESS RQS: SUGGESTED ANSWERS

- “Are all AmeriCorps members engaged in delivering health literacy activities?”
 - Too vague
 - Better: To what extent are AmeriCorps members consistently implementing the program for the same target population across sites?
- “Are program participants more likely to adopt preventive health practices than non-participants?”
 - This is not appropriate for a process evaluation

OUTCOME RQS: SUGGESTED ANSWERS

- “Is the program implemented with fidelity across the target populations?”
 - Not appropriate for outcome evaluation
- “Did workshops result in greater investment in health literacy?”
 - Too vague
 - Better: “Did program participants improve their skills in using health information after program completion?”

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

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

RESOURCES

- CNCS's Knowledge Network
 - <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/americorps/evaluation-resources-amicorps-state-national-grantees>
- The American Evaluation Association
 - <http://www.eval.org>
- The Evaluation Center
 - <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/>
- The Community Tool Box
 - <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/evaluate/evaluate-community-interventions/choose-evaluation-questions/main>
- Choosing the Right Research Questions
 - http://www.wcasa.org/file_open.php?id=1045