



Evaluation questions 1.01: a guide to developing good questions to underpin your evaluation

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Before we develop the survey let's start with the bigger question this evaluation is designed to answer.

I'll double check my notes, but I don't think we have one of those.



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Why are evaluation questions important?



Why are evaluation questions important?

- Define the purpose, scale, scope and focus of the evaluation
- Clarify the priorities and needs of stakeholders
- Clarify how the evaluation results will be used and by whom
- Core tool to engage stakeholders in the evaluation
- Affect the resourcing, timescale and methodological approach your evaluation takes
- Closely tied to the underlying theory of change and/or logic model

Evaluation questions 1.01

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- How?
- Why?
- Which?
- Whose?
- At what cost?
- To what effect?

The real question
is "what isn't
evaluation?"



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Poor evaluation questions

- Can...?
- Should...?
- Would...?

These words tend to require a 'yes' or 'no' answer, or an affirmative agreement with the question. Since these question words lead to an expected answer, they are not really questions.

Types of questions (and answers)

- Closed: Closed questions are framed to seek information/clarification
- Answers: tend to be factual, short response. Yes/No answers.
- Open: Open questions are framed questions to prompt discussion
- Answers: tend to come from evidence which informs an opinion on the balance of the evidence presented, explaining the context and nuance

Types of questions (and answers)

- Descriptive questions: Seek to describe the current (or past) state
- Answers: describe what is happening now or happened in the past

- Normative questions: Seek to compare one thing with another
- Answers: Compare 'what is' to 'what should be'

- Cause and effect questions: Seek to assess if 'A' (Action) led to 'R' (Result)
- Answers: Assess if results have been achieved due to the intervention (activity, programme etc.)



Thinking about ‘interventions’



What do we mean by an 'intervention' when undertaking an evaluation?

- Project
 - Programme
 - Activity
 - Investment
 - ...
-
- Identify, define and document 'it'
 - Document if, when and how 'it' changes over time
 - Acknowledge, articulate the role that evaluation (and the researchers/evaluators) may have had in influencing the design and delivery of the intervention



Different questions lead to
different types of evaluations



Types of evaluation

Formative evaluation

- Focus on learning and improvement
- During and alongside the intervention
- Enable mid-course corrections
- Identify barriers and enablers for implementation
- Often internal evaluation, small scale

Summative evaluation

- Assess whether the intervention ‘worked’ or not
- Focused on the outcomes achieved and impact
- Often comprehensive, large scale, external evaluation

Types of evaluation - theory led approaches

- Evaluations are based on an explicit theory of change and/or logic model that explains the theory of an intervention (activity or programme)
- The evaluation is designed to test the theory to see if it holds true in practice
- The evaluation needs to produce the evidence that shows what has changed at each level of the programme theory/logic model, and explores the linkages between those changes

Types of evaluation - realist evaluation

- Evaluations are designed to improve understanding about how and why different projects and programmes work in different contexts
- Focused on causal chains – assessing what contributes and how results are achieved. **C**ontext > **M**echanism > **O**utcome
- Good for new and scaling up situations, or when results appear to be mixed

Evaluation questions:

- What works (or doesn't work)?
- For whom (and to what extent)?
- In which circumstances does it work?
- How and why does it work?

Types of evaluation - experimental approaches

- Experimental: Observations are made about an intervention. Participants are placed randomly into *equivalent treatment/control groups. Results are compared. Focus on evidencing cause and effect
- Quasi-experimental: the intervention is viewed as a 'treatment' is tested for how well it achieves its objectives, as measured by a pre-specified set of indicators, and seeks a *meaningful comparator. Lacks random assignment
- *Counterfactual = what would have happened if a person or unit of observation had not participated in the intervention

Organising your questions and evaluation types

- Process Evaluation > Process questions: focus on the implementation process (i.e. the way in which the inputs, activities and outputs have been arranged for delivery)
- Outcome and Impact Evaluation > Outcome and impact questions: focus on the effect and what has been achieved as a result of the investment (i.e. the outcomes and impacts achieved)
- Economic evaluation: focus on the economic impact of the investment and/or efficient use of resources

Process evaluation – example questions

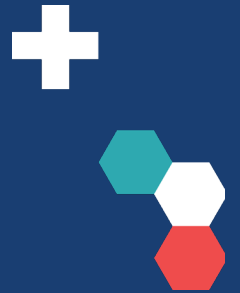
- How is the activity or programme being implemented?
- To what extent are required policies and procedures being followed?
- Are programme participants being reached as intended?
- How satisfied are programme participants?
- What has been done in an innovative way within the programme?

Outcome and impact evaluation – example questions

- How well did the programme work?
- Did the program produce or contribute to the intended outcomes in the short, medium and long term?
- For whom, in what ways and in what circumstances?
- What unintended outcomes (positive and negative) occurred?
- To what extent can changes observed be attributed to the programme?
- What were the particular features of the programme and/or context that made a difference?
- What was the influence of other factors on the programme?

Economic evaluation – example questions

- What has been the ratio of costs to benefits?
- What is the most cost-effective option?
- Has the programme been cost-effective (compared to alternative approaches)?
- Is the programme the best use of available resources?



Time to get organised



Organising your questions

- Prioritise your questions based on stakeholder needs
 - Is there a 'sequence' or flow through the questions that can help to order and prioritise them?
 - 'Headline question' (no more than 5)
 - Sub-questions: more detailed sub-questions linked to the headline question
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- Do you need a mixed or blended approach to your evaluation?

Reflect on your evaluation questions, do they...

- Meet the needs of stakeholders?
- Reflect the goals you set out to achieve?
- Reflect the key components of the theory of change and/or logic model?
- Provide information that stakeholders can act upon?
- Can they be answered using available resources (£+data+effort)?

Evaluation question - tips

- Do all this before you think about the methods you will use
- Take time and engage widely before agreeing your questions (scoping phase) – stakeholder mapping?
- Be reasonable in the way you frame your questions – think about how they might be received and perceived
- Balance for questions: process evaluation and/or outcome and impact evaluation
- Design your evaluation approach and methodology to answer the questions
- Continually anchor your work to the questions – if something ‘new’ comes along critically assess if/how it fits

Useful resources

Description of different evaluation types:

<https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Types-of-Evaluation.pdf>

Evaluation questions:

https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow_framework/frame/specify_key_evaluation_questions

How to write good evaluation questions:

<https://www.evalacademy.com/articles/how-to-write-good-evaluation-questions>