Module 5

Defining Evaluation Questions
Module Objectives

By the end of this module you will be able to:

1. Identify the 3 types of evaluation questions.
2. Identify what makes a good evaluation question.
3. Know difference between typical performance evaluation and impact evaluation questions.
4. Break questions down into sub-questions.
5. Use the design matrix as an organizing tool.
6. Identify additional sources to tap for questions.
7. Use a results framework to develop questions.
8. Identify and apply criteria for prioritizing questions.
## ADS References for this Module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADS Reference</th>
<th>Topic or Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADS 201.3.1.6 and 201.3.15</td>
<td>PE’s focus on descriptive and normative questions and others related to operational decision-making.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADS 203.3.1</td>
<td>Careful selection of evaluation questions to test fundamental assumptions underlying project design; thematic questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADS 203.3.1</td>
<td>Identify questions during program design.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADS 203.3.1</td>
<td>Link questions to required decisions.</td>
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<td>ADS 203.3.16</td>
<td>Consultation with in-country partners and beneficiaries is essential to ensure question relevance.</td>
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<td>ADS 203 3.1.4</td>
<td>Stakeholders consulted to assist in prioritizing questions.</td>
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<td>ADS 203 3.1.4</td>
<td>Identify a small number of key questions and specific issues answerable with empirical evidence.</td>
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<td>ADS 203 3.1.5</td>
<td>Evaluation reports to address all questions in SOW.</td>
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<td>ADS 203 3.1.5</td>
<td>Statement of Work to include evaluation questions.</td>
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Types of Questions

1. **Descriptive questions**
   - Represent “what is”

2. **Normative questions**
   - Comparisons of “what is” to “what should be”

3. **Cause and Effect questions**
   - Identify if results have been achieved due to the intervention
1. Descriptive Questions

Represent “what is”

- Like a snapshot
- Seek to describe or understand a program or process, or attitudes towards it
- Often used to seek opinions from project participants or beneficiaries
- Typically, Performance Evaluations contain descriptive questions
Examples – Descriptive Questions

- What do stakeholder groups see as the goals of the program?
- What are the primary activities of the program?
- Where has the program been implemented?
- Who received what services?
A Special Point-

Questions about the extent of gains or changes over a period of time—whether concerning crop production, traffic flows, trade patterns, test scores, attitudes or behaviors—are descriptive questions.
2. Normative (Comparative) Questions

Is what is what should be?

- Often use monitoring data
- Measuring against previously established criteria (or norms)
- Often are questions about outputs or outcomes
- Did the project meet the targets on specified indicators?
- Did the project conform to general standards?
Examples – Normative Questions

- Did the project spend as much as was budgeted?
- To what extent was the budget spent efficiently?
- To what extent was the target of vaccinating 80% of the nation’s children met?
- To what extent was the program gender equitable?
Where to Find the Standards/Norms

- Program design documents
- Monitoring systems-indicators with targets
- Documented standards from USAID or other agencies
- Accreditation systems, blue-ribbon panels, professional organizations

Should the evaluation team set them?
3. Cause and Effect Questions

Identify if results have been achieved due to the intervention

- Seek to determine what difference *the intervention* made
- Eliminate all other possible explanations
- Ask if the desired results have been achieved AND whether it is the intervention that has caused results
- Suggest before & after and with & without comparisons

*Impact Evaluations* focus on cause and effect questions
Examples – Cause and Effect Questions

- Did the three-country partnership strategy preserve the biodiversity of the affected area while sustaining livelihoods?

- As a result of the job training program, do participants have higher paying jobs than they otherwise would have?

- Did the increased tax on gasoline improve air quality?
What do you think?

Can Performance Evaluations address cause and effect questions?
Exercise 5-1

What type of question is it?

If unclear, rewrite to clarify
Good Questions

• Are listed in priority order
• Link clearly to the evaluation purpose
• Are realistic in number and kind given the time and resources available
• Can be answered definitively
• Reflect stakeholder needs and interests; including those of women and minority groups
• Consider the timing relative to the program or policy cycle—reflect the requirement for utility
• Are not two (or more) questions in one
• Are extent, how, what questions rather than yes/no questions (unless normative)
Sub-questions are Often Needed

How relevant was the intervention?

- To what extent did the project fit within USAID’s country health strategy?
- To what extent was the intervention aligned with the host country government’s priorities?
- Was the timing appropriate given the political context?

What were the characteristics of those served?

- What were the most prevalent age groups?
- To what extent was gender equity achieved?
- What were participants’ most frequent health issues?
- Did we target the youth most considered ‘at risk’?
## C-8: Evaluation Design Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Purpose:</th>
<th>General Design:</th>
<th>Page 1 A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Sub-questions</td>
<td>Type of sub-question</td>
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# The Design Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Design:</th>
<th>Page 1 B</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Sample or Census</td>
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Some Sources of Evaluation Questions

What are some sources for evaluation questions?
OECD/DAC Principles: Evaluation Questions

OECD/DAC Principles: **R-4**

- **Relevance**
- **Effectiveness**
- **Efficiency**
- **Sustainability**
- **Impact** *(See note in handout)*
### Logical Frameworks Generate Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Summary</th>
<th>Objectively Verifiable Indicator</th>
<th>Means of Verification</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased standard of living in the eastern province</td>
<td>% of targeted population with higher standard of living 3 yrs after program completion</td>
<td>Sample survey</td>
<td>Economic and weather conditions remain stable</td>
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<td>Literacy at the 6th grade level is improved</td>
<td>% of population with literacy rates at or above the 6th grade level</td>
<td>Annual standardized literacy test</td>
<td>Parents, teachers, and students believe literacy is important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity for schools to teach reading and writing is improved</td>
<td># of people trained % of participants successfully completing the 2-week course</td>
<td>Sign-in sheets; course evaluations</td>
<td>Skills learned are applied in school settings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruit skilled instructors; train teachers; provide teaching materials</td>
<td># training sessions offered % teachers recruited with necessary skill sets</td>
<td>Competency assessments; program records</td>
<td>A pool of qualified instructors exists in-country</td>
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</table>
Identifying and Selecting Questions

Two phases:

• **Divergent Phase:** develop a comprehensive list of questions

• **Convergent Phase:** narrow down the list
A sound balance between evaluation questions and the time and resources available to answer them is essential.
Some Criteria for Prioritizing

- Does this fit the stated purpose of the evaluation?
- Will this accommodate key stakeholders?
- Who would use the information for what decision?
- Would the information possibly change the course of events?
- Does the question focus on a critical or major issue, or is the question merely of passing interest?
- Is it feasible to adequately answer the question, given time and budget constraints?
- Would the evaluation be compromised if this question was dropped? Is it critical to the study’s credibility?
- Others?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Of interest to key stakeholders?</td>
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<td>2. Answerable?</td>
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<td>3. Likely to yield information linked to a decision?</td>
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<td>4. Critical to the study’s credibility?</td>
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<td>5. Likely to impact the course of events?</td>
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Which Would You Prefer?

Evaluation SOW 1
• Ethiopia

Evaluation SOW 2
• Kosovo (KCBS)
A Final Point

Defining evaluation questions should be a collaborative and iterative process that serves to promote later use of evaluation findings!
Review Questions

• What are the three types of evaluation questions?

• Which evaluation questions are typically found in performance evaluations? Impact evaluations?

• What are some good sources for evaluation questions?
1. Using your project documents as a base, develop 3 major questions your group wants to ask in your evaluation, ensuring they are consistent with your evaluation purpose;

2. Identify the type of question (D, N, or C&E);

3. Identify a few subquestions as appropriate for each question;

4. Be ready to present your group work