WRITING A STRONG EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

WORKSHEET

The first step towards building sound, useful, and relevant evidence is asking the right question. Strong research questions serve as the foundation of a successful evaluation. They define the topic of the study and anchor and provide structure to all other evaluation activities, from sample identification, to instrument development, to data collection and analysis.

Planning

Before drafting an evidence-building question, start with a few key considerations to help you plan, including….

Who will use the evidence?

When is the evidence needed?

What level of rigor is needed?

Are there any political considerations/sensitivities?

Why is this question being asked? What information is needed for decision-making, learning, or improvement?

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What purpose will answering the question serve?

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What, if any, stakeholders should be engaged on this question before drafting? What are their equities?

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What existing evidence or data is available to build on?

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Drafting and Refining

Look at the initial draft of the evidence-building question and ask… (remember the question can be refined and revised as needed)

Is it answerable via empirical, evidence-building methods?

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Can the question be answered directly or will the response rely on proxy data?

Does the question clearly and fully reflect the information need?

If answered will the evidence be at the right level of specificity to be usable?

Is it unbiased or neutral, and free from assumptions?

Does it reflect the best available or current knowledge on the subject?

Is it written so that it is understandable to a range of audiences?

Is it written in clear and plain language?

Can the question stand on its own, or does it need to be reframed or broken into multiple questions?

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Moving Forward

Once the question (or questions) meets all of the above, consider….

What type(s) of evidence is best suited to answer it (i.e., foundational fact finding, policy analysis, performance measurement, or program evaluation)?

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What types of methodological approaches may be appropriate to answer it?

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What resources (i.e., capacity, staff, infrastructure, etc.) are needed to move forward?

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How long will it take to answer the question and for lengthy research, is it possible to report on interim findings?

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