NORC at the University of Chicago

How to Write an Evaluation Plan

AmeriCorps

Learning Objectives

- Understand what an evaluation plan is and the purpose of developing one

- Identify key sections of an evaluation plan

- Understand what information to include in an evaluation plan

What is an Evaluation Plan?

- Details the program model being evaluated

- Describes and justifies the evaluation approach selected

- Provides instructions for the evaluation / a guide for each step of the evaluation process

Purpose of an Evaluation Plan

- Helps decide what information is needed to address the evaluation objectives

- Helps identify methods for getting the needed information

- Helps determine a reasonable and realistic timeline for the evaluation

- Creates a shared understanding between stakeholders (e.g., the grantee staff, evaluator, AmeriCorps staff)

Small and Large Requirements for an Evaluation Plan

	Small Grantees (<$500,000)	Large Grantees (>$500,000)
When are grantees required to conduct an evaluation?	During 2nd competitive grant cycle, and all following competitive cycles.	During 2nd competitive grant cycle, and all following competitive cycles.
When must evaluation plans be approved?	By the end of the first year of the second grant cycle.	By the end of the first year of the second grant cycle.
What evaluation design is required?	Any design (e.g., process, non-experimental outcomes).	Impact evaluation (experimental or quasi-experimental).
What type of evaluator?	Internal or external evaluator.	External evaluator.

Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA)

AEA	Grantee	Justification
Funding threshold	Large	- Grantees who receive an average of less than $1 million per year can request to be exempt from the large grantee requirements and conduct an internal non-impact evaluation.
Previous impact evaluation	Large	- Previously conducted an impact evaluation with demonstrated evidence of effectiveness (i.e., Strong or Moderate evidence).
AmeriCorps National Evaluation	Large or Small	- Grantees participating in an AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation national evaluation (i.e., bundled evaluation or Return on Investment) that will not be completed during current grant cycle - Large grantees can also request this if the national evaluation's design does not fulfill the requirements for a large grantee.

Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA) – continued

AEA	Grantee	Justification
Structure of program or grantee organization	Large	- Insurmountable challenges forming a comparison group. - Significant changes to program design.
Replication	Large	- Implementing an evidence-based intervention with fidelity in a new setting. - A grantee's application must be assessed at the Strong or Moderate evidence level.
Timing	Large or Small	- Evaluation will not be completed by end of current grant cycle. - AEA approval required only if an interim evaluation report will not meet evaluation requirements.

Key Components of a Plan

I. Theory of change

II. Scope of the evaluation

III. Evaluation outcome(s) of interest

IV. Research questions

V. Evaluation design

VI. Sampling methods

VII. Data collection procedures, data sources, and measurement tools

VIII. Analysis plan

IX. Evaluator qualifications

X. Timeline

XI. Budget

What to include in the...

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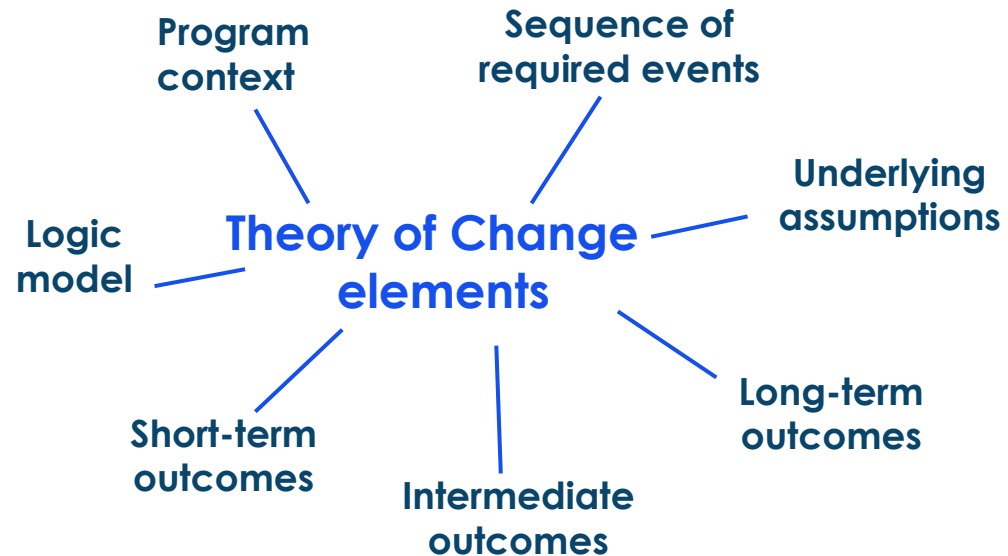VII. Data collection procedures, data sources, and measurement tools

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I. Theory of Change

Theory of Change elements:
- Program context
- Sequence of required events
- Underlying assumptions
- Logic model
- Short-term outcomes
- Intermediate outcomes
- Long-term outcomes

- Describe how the activities undertaken by your program contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended outcomes

- Your evaluation plan must align with your theory of change and your logic model

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II. Scope of the Evaluation

- State the goal(s) of the evaluation and specify which program activities will be assessed

- Programs are not expected to evaluate every component of their logic model. Instead, the evaluation may focus on a sub-set of program activities.

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III. Outcome(s) of Interest

- Describe what outcomes your evaluation will measure
  - Process / implementation outcomes or outputs
  - Program beneficiary outcomes
  - Member outcomes

- Your outcomes of interest should be:
  - Part of your program's theory of change and included in your logic model
  - Feasible for your program to measure given the source(s) of data needed and level of effort required

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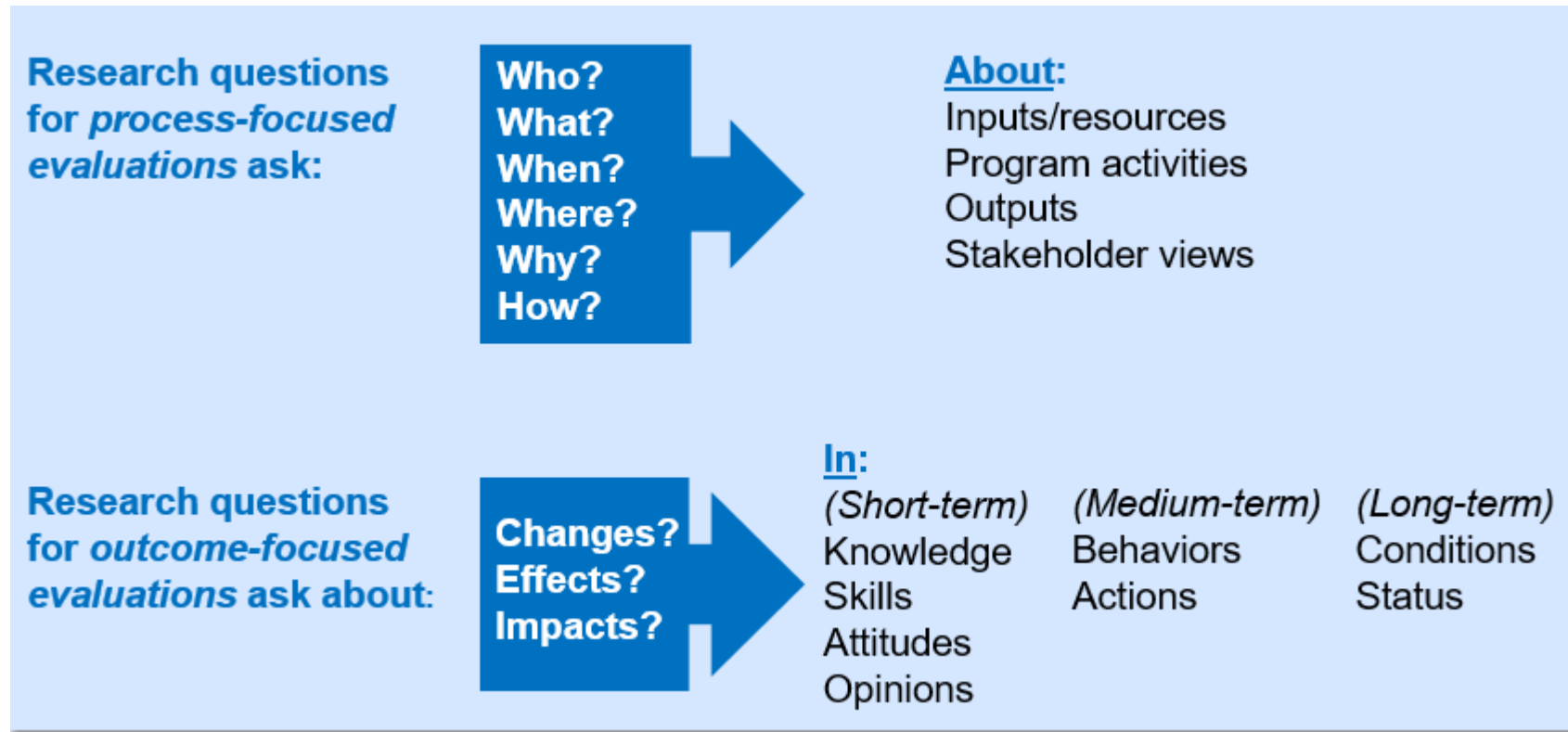XI. Budget

IV. Research Questions

- One or more questions that define exactly what your evaluation intends to accomplish

- The following are characteristics of a good research question:
  - Clearly stated and specific

  - Aligns with your theory of change / logic model

  - Connect to the outcomes of interest

  - Measurable and feasible to answer

  - Aligns with your chosen evaluation design

IV. Research Questions

Research questions are worded differently depending on their focus:

Research questions for *process-focused* evaluations ask:

Who?
What?
When?
Where?
Why?
How?

About:
Inputs/resources
Program activities
Outputs
Stakeholder views

Research questions for *outcome-focused* evaluations ask about:

Changes?
Effects?
Impacts?

In:

(Short-term)	(Medium-term)	(Long-term)
Knowledge	Behaviors	Conditions
Skills	Actions	Status
Attitudes		
Opinions		

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V. Evaluation Design

Description of general categories of evaluation designs:

Process Evaluation	Outcome Evaluation	Impact Evaluation
• Examines the extent to which a program is operating as intended by assessing ongoing program operations and determining whether the target population is being served • Results may be used to determine what changes and/or improvements should be made to the program's operations	• Measures changes in knowledge, attitude(s), behavior(s) and/or condition(s) among program beneficiaries or other stakeholder groups • Results may demonstrate what the program has achieved	• Measures changes in program beneficiaries or stakeholders relative to a reasonably similar comparison/ control group • Results are an estimate of the program's impact on beneficiaries or other stakeholder groups

V. AmeriCorps Approved Evaluation Designs

Type of Design	Category	Details needed on evaluation design
Experimental design/Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)	Impact	• Description of the random assignment procedures that will be used to form treatment and control groups • Eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study
Quasi-experimental Design (QED)	Impact	• Description of the approach for identifying a reasonably similar comparison group (e.g., propensity score matching, difference in difference analysis) • List of variables (covariates) to be used to statistically equate treatment and comparison groups at baseline
Non-experimental Design	Outcome	• Description of whether pre- AND post-test measurements OR post-only measurements will be used
Process	Process	• Description of the methods that will be used (i.e., qualitative only, quantitative only, or mixed methods)

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VI. Sampling Methods

- For each data source, describe the sample or the target population for the evaluation, including:
  - Eligibility criteria that limits the sample or population (e.g., participation level, site/location, age or grade level)
  - Sampling procedures (e.g., random, purposeful, or convenience sampling)
  - Expected size of the sample or population
  - Rationale or justification for sample sizes

- For ASN grantees, sample size justification is required for non-experimental (i.e., rationale for sample selection) and impact designs (i.e., a power analysis)

VI. Sampling Methods

- **A power analysis** is used to determine:
  - How large a sample is needed to enable statistical judgments that are accurate and reliable (i.e., required minimum sample size)
  - How likely your statistical test will be to detect effects of a given size in a particular situation

- It is recommended that a plan **include the results of a power analysis if**:
  - It is an impact evaluation design (i.e., RCT or QED)
  - Your analysis involves statistical significance testing

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VII. Data Collection Procedures, Data Sources, and Measurement Tools

- Provide a detailed description of the data that will be collected or extracted to answer the research questions. This section should address:

    - Who/what will be the source of the data?
    - What tools/instruments will be used to collect data?
    - What is the plan for accessing administrative/extant data?
    - What information will be collected/compiled?
    - When and how often data will data be collected?

- Ensure that the data are adequate for addressing all of the study's research questions

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VIII. Analysis Plan

Explain how each data source will be analyzed to produce findings that address the evaluation's research questions

Type of design	Details needed on analysis
Non-experimental / Process evaluation design	• The <u>quantitative</u> data analysis techniques that will be used to produce the study findings (e.g., Chi-square, t-tests, frequencies, means) • The <u>qualitative</u> data analysis techniques that will be used to produce the study findings (e.g., content analysis, thematic coding)

VIII. Analysis Plan

Type of design	Details needed on analysis
Impact design (RCT or QED)	• The statistical test/model that will be used to compare outcomes for the treatment and comparison groups • Plans to assess baseline equivalency of the treatment and comparison groups and any statistical adjustments to be used (if necessary)

NOTE: Chi-square tests and t-tests are not adequate for conducting a QED analysis. Instead, a multivariate regression model (e.g., ANOVA) is preferred, so covariates (e.g., pre-test measures and other variables that may affect the outcome of interest) can be controlled for in the analysis.

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IX. Evaluator Qualifications

- Describe the **evaluator(s)** who will be carrying out the evaluation activities, including
  - Whether they are internal or external to the program;
  - If using an external evaluator, the description clearly describes how they are independent from the program (e.g., no conflicts of interest); and
  - Qualifications for conducting the evaluation

- The type of evaluator used may also depend on the size of your program
  - Small grantees (<$500,000) can use an internal or external evaluator
  - Large grantees (>$500,000) expected to use an external evaluator, unless a Funding Threshold AEA is pursued

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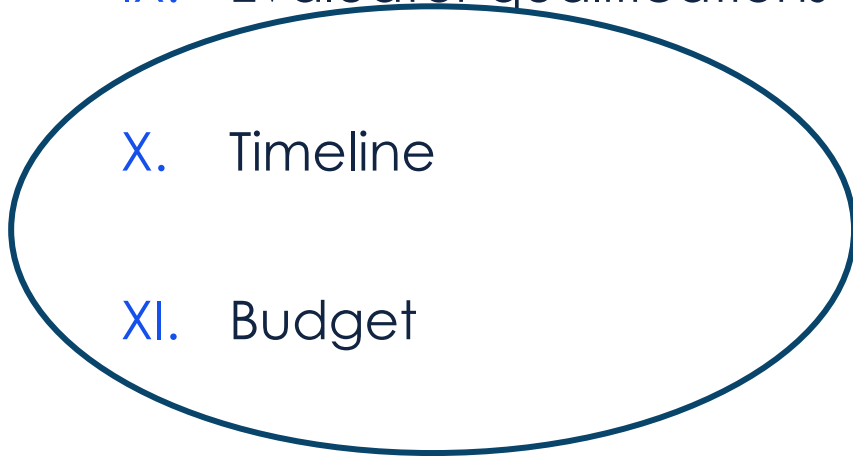
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X-IX. Timeline and Budget

- Provide a detailed **timeline** of when the major evaluation activities will occur (e.g., evaluation planning, hire evaluator, develop instruments, collect data, analyze data, write report)
  - Helps determine if the evaluation is on track to be completed on time (i.e., before the next GARP cycle)

- Specify the **budget** allotted for the evaluation

General Guidelines to Follow

- Know what type of evaluation you must complete
  - Small vs large grantee requirements
  - AEA options available

- Fully describe each component of the plan
  - See ASN Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and Frequently Asked Questions: Evaluation for relevant grant cycle
  - Review the Evaluation Plan template

- Ensure that your description of each of the components aligns with one another (i.e., interrelated)

Internal Resources

- Your AmeriCorps Portfolio Manager or State Commission representative

- ASN – Evaluation Resources https://www.americorps.gov/grantees-sponsors/evaluation-resources
  - 2021 ASN Grantee Symposium presentation *Demystifying Evaluation Plans: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ0s9HL8Q2A*

- AmeriCorps Evaluation TA Portal https://americorpsevaluationta.norc.org

Internal Resources (continued)

- Resources for State and National Direct Grantees
  https://americorps.gov/grantees-sponsors/directs-territories-tribes?field_document_type_tax_target_id=19756#resources
  - This page includes information about the following:
    - AEA Guidance and Request Form
    - Evaluation FAQs
    - Evaluation Plan Template
    - Evaluation Requirements

External Resources

- Your external evaluator

- The American Evaluation Association
  http://www.eval.org

Questions?

Thank you!

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