

NORC at the University of Chicago

# Basic Steps in Conducting an Evaluation



# Learning Objectives



By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:

- Describe the basic steps for conducting an evaluation
- Plan for an evaluation
- Identify the key components of an evaluation plan
- Identify approaches for collecting and analyzing data
- Understand how to communicate and apply findings for program improvement

# Overview of Presentation



What are the basic steps for conducting an evaluation?

- Planning phase
- Development phase
- Implementation phase
- Action and improvement

# Evaluation Cycle—Four Phases

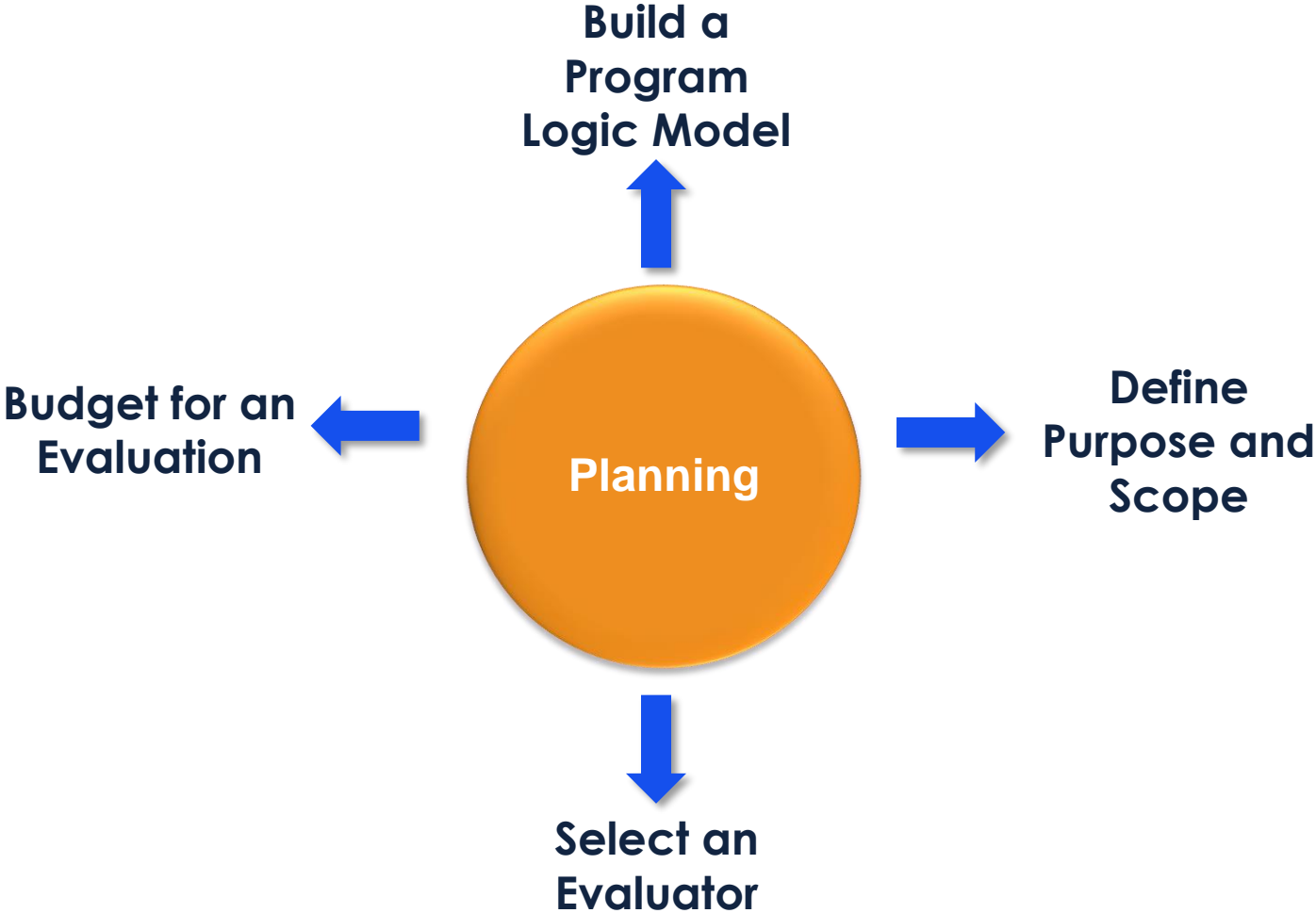


# Basic Steps for Conducting an Evaluation



Phase	Step
Planning	Step 1: Build (or Review) a Program Logic Model Step 2: Define Purpose and Scope Step 3: Budget for an Evaluation Step 4: Select an Evaluator
Development	Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan
Implementation	Step 6: Collect Data Step 7: Analyze Data
Action and Improvement	Step 8: Communicate Findings Step 9: Apply Findings and Feedback for Program Improvement

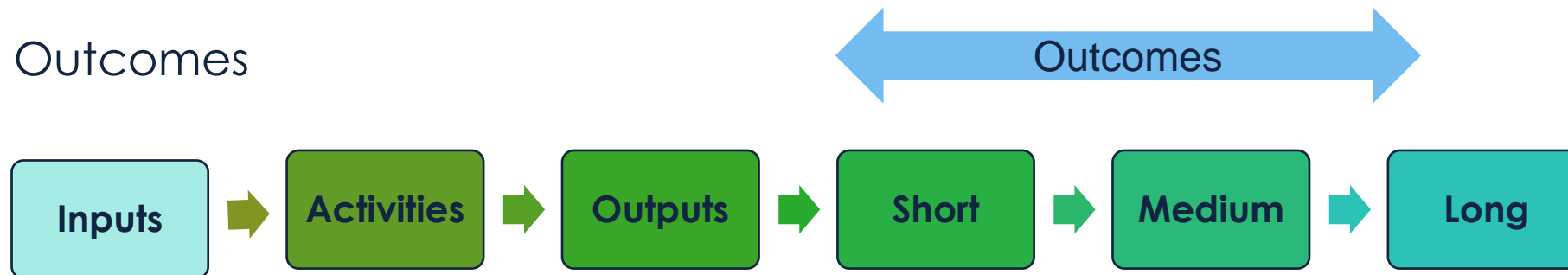
# Planning Phase Steps





# Step 1: Build a Program Logic Model

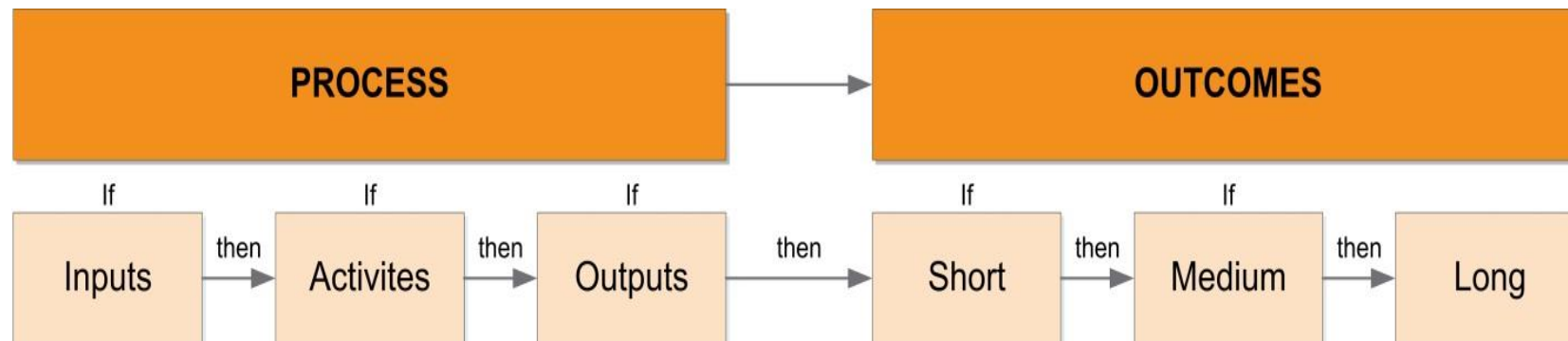
- A program logic model is a detailed visual representation of a program and its theory of change.
- Communicates how a program works by depicting the intended relationships among program components:
  - Inputs or resources
  - Activities
  - Outputs
  - Outcomes



# Step 1: Build a Program Logic Model



- Logic models read from left to right
- There are two “sides” to a logic model - a process side and an outcomes side.





# Step 1: Example Logic Model



## Process

## Outcomes

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 Staff 100 AmeriCorps State and National members 50 non-AmeriCorps volunteers Research	Conduct job readiness workshops Provide job search assistance Provide peer counseling services Provide referrals to transitioning services Educate potential employers	# individuals participating in workshops # individuals receiving job search assistance # individuals receiving counseling services # families receiving referrals # employers receiving education	Increased confidence in gaining employment Increase in job readiness skills Increased knowledge of effective job search strategies Increased knowledge of community services Increased employer knowledge of hiring benefits	Increase in job placement Increased capacity of families to manage transition from military to civilian work and family life Increased adoption of military-friendly practices by employers	Individuals maintain stable employment Increased family well-being Employers routinely hire veterans and military spouses



# Step 1: Build a Program Logic Model

Why develop a logic model?

- Generate clear and shared understanding of how program works
- Support program planning and improvement
- Serve as foundation for evaluation

For an overview of logic models, AmeriCorps grantees can refer to the module, “How to Develop a Program Logic Model” located on the Evaluation Resources webpage.



# Step 1: Build a Program Logic Model

- A logic model can serve as a framework for your written evaluation plan.
- It can help you focus your evaluation by identifying:
  - Questions want/need answered
  - Aspects of program to evaluate
  - Type of evaluation design
  - Information to collect
  - Measures and data collection methods
  - Evaluation timeframe

For more information on logic models, AmeriCorps grantees can refer to the module, “How to Develop a Program Logic Model” located on the Evaluation Resources webpage.

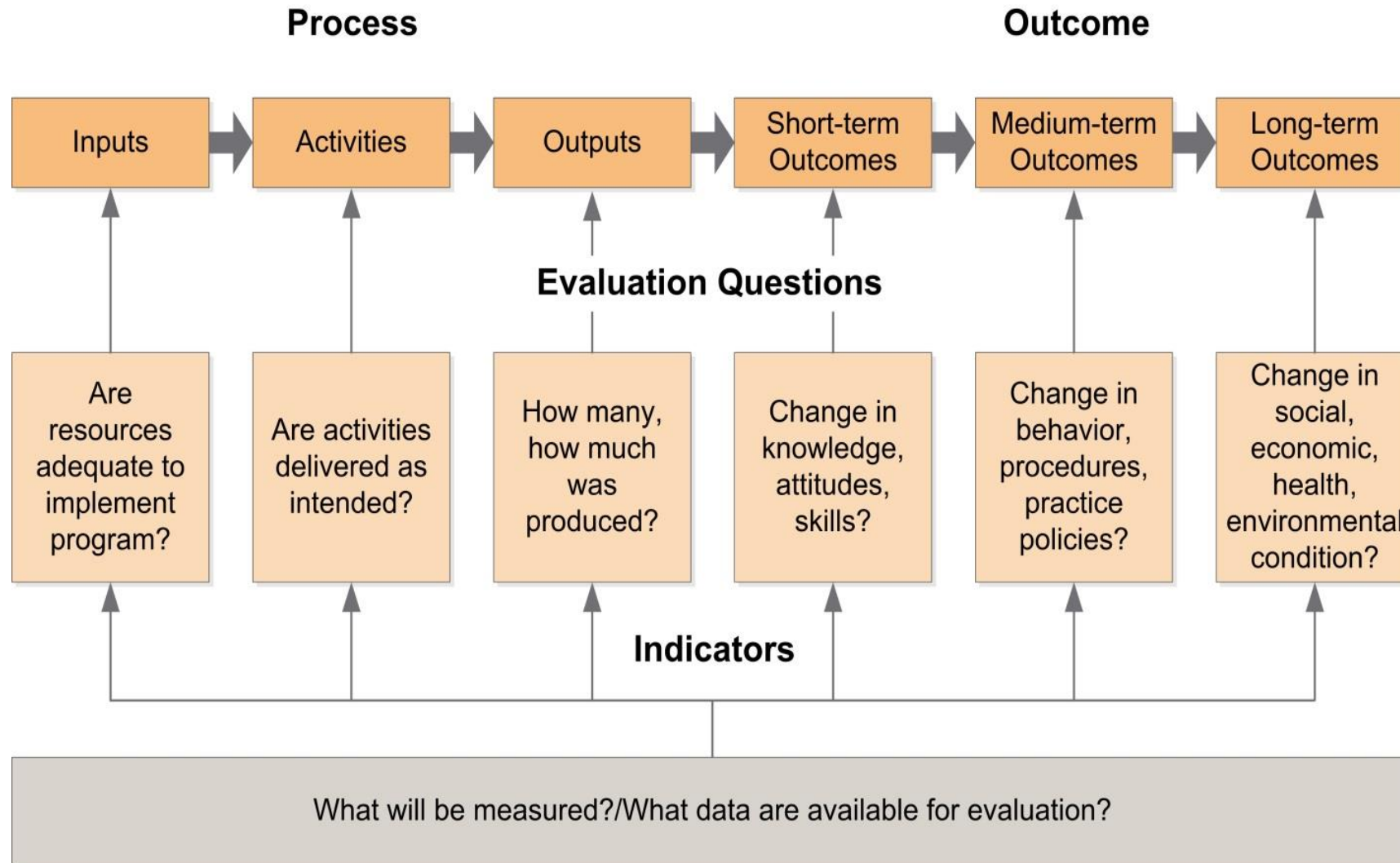
## Step 2: Define Purpose and Scope



Each evaluation should have a *primary* purpose around which it can be designed and planned.

- Why is the evaluation being done? What do you want to learn?
- How will the results be used? By whom?
- Additional things to consider:
  - Specific program requirements
  - Resources available to carry out the evaluation

# Step 2: Define Purpose and Scope



# Group Exercise: Develop Research Questions for a Veterans Job Readiness Program



## Exercise

The hypothetical veterans program is designed to address unemployment among veterans and their spouses as well as their transition into civilian work and community life.

**Using the logic model developed for the veterans program, what might be some potential research questions?**

## Step 3: Budget for an Evaluation



Common cost categories:

- Staff time
- Materials, equipment, and supplies
- Travel
- Data collection



## Step 3: Budget for an evaluation

Consider questions of:

- Who will conduct it?
  - If *external evaluator*, consider what services are and are not included in their cost
  - If *own staff*, consider cost of time spent on evaluation relative to programmatic tasks
- What will it include and how will it be conducted?
- Will it involve new data collection?
  - If so, at what time points and where?
- Who will manage it?



## Step 4: Select an Evaluator



- An evaluator is an individual or team of people responsible for leading the evaluation.
- Potential options for an evaluator include:
  - An external source (e.g., consulting firm, college or university personnel, independent consultant)
  - An internal source - program staff member(s)

## Step 4: Select an Evaluator



A key decision is whether to use an internal staff member or to rely on an external evaluator.

- Consider what expertise is needed
  - Scope and complexity may demand expertise outside of your program staff
- Check your funder's requirements
  - Funders may require an external evaluation to ensure objectivity (e.g., Required for AmeriCorps ASN grantees receiving >\$500,000 annually)
- Consider financial and staff time implications
  - Both types of evaluations have cost implications, whether financial or staff time



## Step 4: Select an Evaluator

- Certain types of AmeriCorps grantees (i.e., AmeriCorps State and National grantees) may be interested in achieving a specific evidence tier.
  - Preliminary evidence- internal or external
  - Moderate evidence- external
  - Strong evidence- external
- Consider taking a hybrid approach
  - Program and external evaluator share evaluation responsibilities

For more information about these requirements and evidence levels, visit:  
<https://americorps.gov/grantees-sponsors/evaluation-resources>

# Step 4: Select an Evaluator



How do you find an external evaluator?

- Academic settings
  - Contact individuals at your local college or university who are not affiliated with the program
- Professional settings
  - American Evaluation Association (AEA) website, click on “Find an Evaluator” tab (<https://www.eval.org>)
- Personal Networks
- Ask your funder

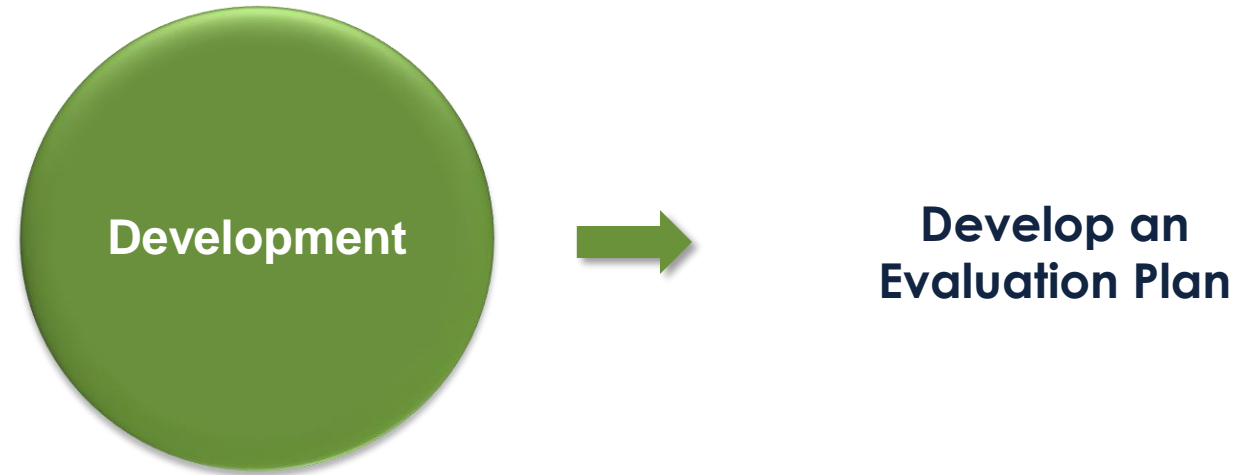


## Step 4: Select an Evaluator

Consider whether your potential evaluator has -

- Formal training in evaluation studies
- Experience evaluating similar programs/interventions
- Experience that matches the design, methods, and/or approach of your planned evaluation
- Capacity to handle the scale of your planned evaluation
- Personal style that fits your program staff or organization
- Ability to conduct an objective and unbiased evaluation (e.g., no conflicts of interest, nor appearance of conflicts).
- Experience working with/evaluating AmeriCorps programs specifically

# Development Step: Developing 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)



# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



What should your evaluation plan include?

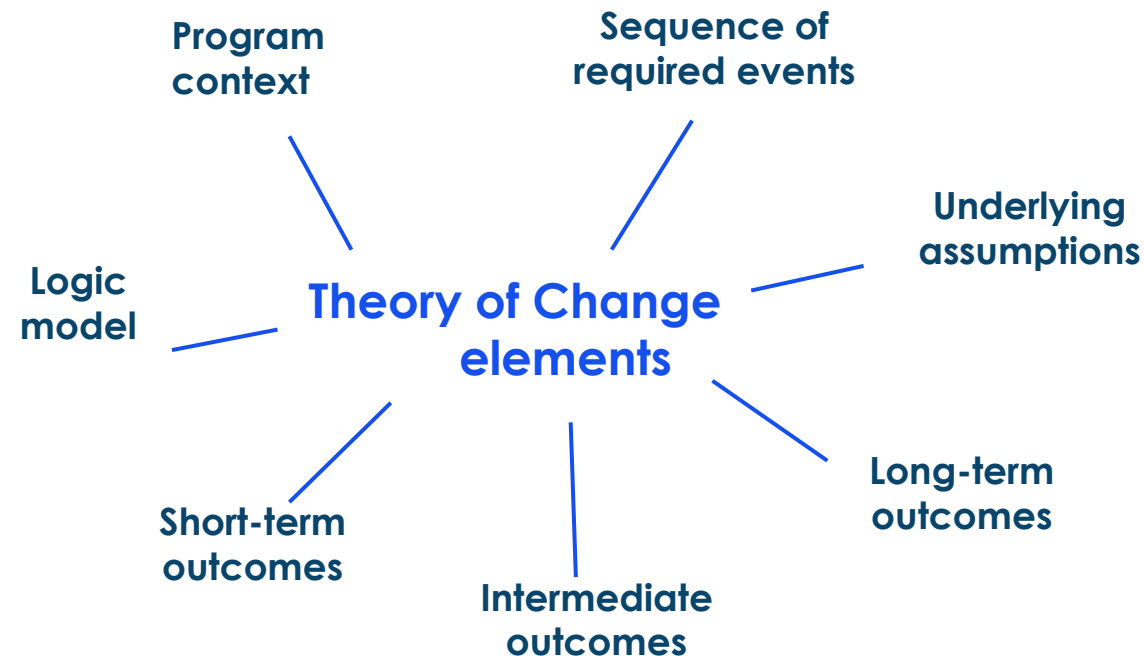
- I. Theory of change
- II. Scope of the evaluation
- III. Evaluation outcome(s) of interest
- IV. Research questions
- V. Evaluation design
- VI. Sampling methods
- VII. Data collection procedures, data sources, and measurement tools
- VIII. Analysis plan
- IX. Evaluator qualifications
- X. Timeline
- XI. Budget

# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



## I. Theory of Change

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



# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



## 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.

# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



## 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

# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



## 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

# Step 5: Develop an evaluation plan



## v. Evaluation Design

- Description of general categories of evaluation designs:

<u>Process Evaluation</u>	<u>Outcome Evaluation</u>	<u>Impact Evaluation</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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</li><li>• Results may be used to determine what changes and/or improvements should be made to the program's operations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measures changes in knowledge, attitude(s), behavior(s) and/or condition(s) among program beneficiaries or other stakeholder groups</li><li>• Results may demonstrate what the program has achieved</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measures changes in program beneficiaries or stakeholders relative to a reasonably similar comparison/ control group</li><li>• Results are an estimate of the program's impact on beneficiaries or other stakeholder groups</li></ul>

# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



## AmeriCorps Approved Evaluation Designs

Type of Design	Category	Details needed on evaluation design
Experimental design/Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)	Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the random assignment procedures that will be used to form treatment and control groups</li><li>• Eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study</li></ul>
Quasi-experimental Design (QED)	Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the approach for identifying a reasonably similar comparison group (e.g., propensity score matching, difference in difference analysis)</li><li>• List of variables (covariates) to be used to statistically equate treatment and comparison groups at baseline</li></ul>
Non-experimental Design	Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of whether pre- AND post-test measurements OR post-only measurements will be used</li></ul>
Process	Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the methods that will be used (i.e., qualitative only, quantitative only, or mixed methods)</li></ul>

# Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan



## 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.



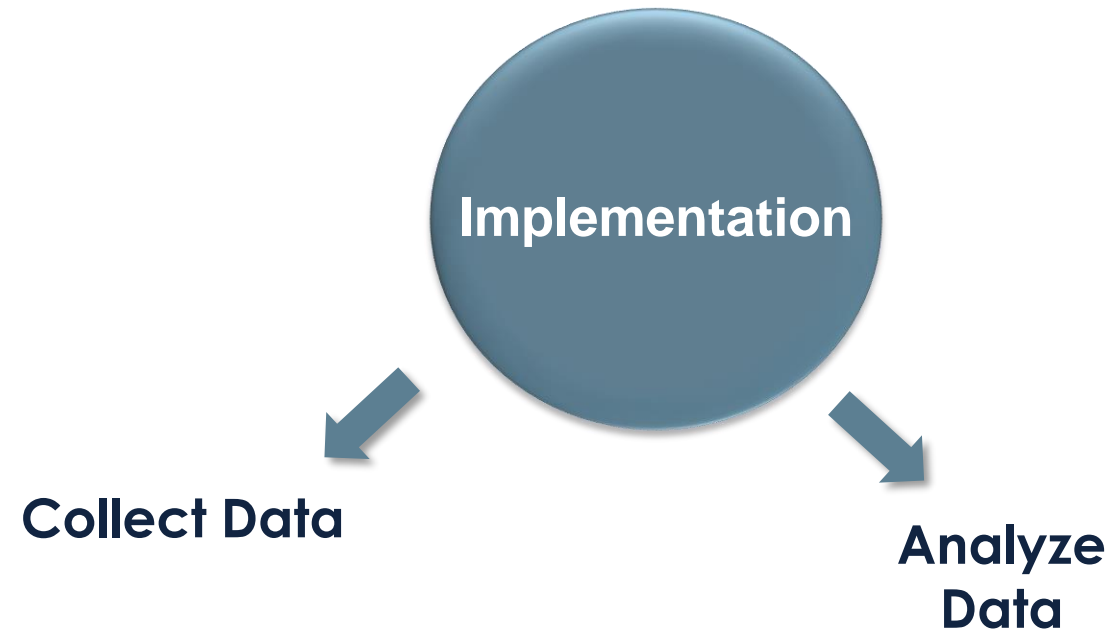
# Step 5: Develop an evaluation plan



Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA) - continued

AEA	Grantee	Justification
Structure of program or grantee organization	Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Insurmountable challenges forming a comparison group.</li><li>- Significant changes to program design.</li></ul>
Replication	Large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Implementing an evidence-based intervention with fidelity in a new setting.</li><li>- A grantee's application must be assessed at the Strong or Moderate evidence level.</li></ul>
Timing	Large or Small	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Evaluation will not be completed by end of current grant cycle.</li><li>- AEA approval required only if an interim evaluation report will not meet evaluation requirements.</li></ul>

# Implementation Steps: Collecting and Analyzing Data



# Step 6: Collect Data



What type of data meets your evaluation needs?

- Existing data (i.e., secondary data)
  - Internal program data (e.g., participant records, program logs, performance measurement data)
  - External datasets / administrative data (e.g., student records, test scores, medical records, test scores, Census data, unemployment insurance claims)
- New data (i.e., primary data)
  - Data from surveys, assessments, interviews, and observations

# Step 6: Collect Data



	Quantitative Methods	Qualitative Methods
Scope	Less in-depth data across a larger number of study subjects	More in-depth data on fewer study subjects
Data collection	Standardized instruments with mainly closed-ended questions (i.e., questions with pre-defined response options) such as surveys and multiple choice assessments/tests	Standardized instruments and semi-structured interview guides mainly with open-ended questions (i.e., questions with no pre-defined response options) and can be used for interview, focus group, and observation protocols
Data format	Numeric	Narrative

# Step 7: Analyze Data



	Quantitative Methods	Qualitative Methods
Data analysis	Statistical approaches are used to summarize the data (frequencies, means, crosstabs, regression )	Content analysis is often used in which themes/patterns in the data are identified, categorized, coded, and summarized
Results	Results can be compared, and generalized to a larger population; May provide statistical evidence of program impact	Results provide meaning, illustrative explanation, and views of study subject(s); NOT able to provide statistical evidence of program impact

# Step 7: Example Data Collection and Analysis Crosswalk



Process Evaluation of a Job Readiness Program for Veterans					
Research question	Indicators	What is collected and how?	From whom / data sources?	When collected and by whom?	How will you analyze the data?
Is the job readiness program being implemented as designed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Member use of program curriculum during workshops</li> <li>b) Duration of workshops</li> <li>c) Participant workshop rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a - c) Members report details about workshops in logs with pre-defined categories of reporting</li> <li>a - b) observations of workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a - c) Members</li> <li>a - b) Evaluator observes participants in workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a - c) External evaluator collects the workshop logs quarterly</li> <li>a) Quarterly observations by the evaluator(s) using structured observation protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a - c) Generate frequencies on use of curriculum; average duration of workshops; and average rate of workshop attendance</li> <li>c) Generate frequencies and averages on quantitative data (e.g., ratings scales, frequency scales) and thematically code and analyze open-ended comments/notes</li> </ul>

# Step 7: Example Data Collection and Analysis Crosswalk



Impact Evaluation of a Job Readiness Program for Veterans					
Research question	Outcome of interest	What is collected and how?	From whom / data sources?	When collected and by whom?	How will you analyze the data?
Do veterans who receive the job readiness intervention have a higher average employment rate compared to a similar group of veterans who did not receive the intervention?	Veterans' employment status	Veterans' employment status is measured with a survey.	Veterans participating in the program serves as the intervention group. Veterans receiving job assistance services from another program serve as the comparison group.	The evaluator administers the survey at two time points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- before the job readiness program begins</li> <li>- 1 year after the job readiness program is implemented</li> </ul>	Calculate the difference in average employment rate in the intervention group minus the difference in average employment rate in the comparison group before and after treatment (difference in differences method)

# Step 7: Analyze Data



Consider two questions:

- What conclusions about the research questions can be drawn from the data that have been analyzed?
- What does the data suggest about the program's theory of change?



# Action and Improvement Steps: Reporting and Utilizing Results



## Step 8: Communicate Findings



Who are the potential target audiences?

- Program staff, agency personnel, stakeholders, beneficiaries, funders, etc.

What are potential tools for communicating findings?

- Formal report, shorter memos, PowerPoint briefings, etc.

## Step 8: Communicate Findings



- AmeriCorps uses evaluation reports to:
  - Identify training and technical assistance needs for grantees
  - Identify and share promising practices and models for replication
  - Strengthen the evidence base for national service
- Grantees are encouraged to use their evaluation report to:
  - Create awareness of and demonstrate success (or lessons learned), and promote sustainability
  - Identify opportunities for program improvement, adjustment, and future action
  - Guide the development of an evaluation plan for upcoming grant cycle
  - Support the evidence base for future grant applications

# Step 8: Communicate Findings



What is an evaluation report?

- A written document that presents the evaluation's methods and findings
- Provides a transparent basis for:
  - Understanding the program's alignment with its theory of change
  - Decision-making on policies and programs
  - Drawing lessons for program improvement



# Step 8: Communicate Findings



What are the key sections of an evaluation report?

- Executive Summary
- Background and Purpose
- Evaluation Methods
- Results/Findings
- Conclusions & Recommendations
- References & Appendices

## Step 8: Communicate Findings



When reporting findings, it is important to:

- Report positive, as well as negative findings
- Present results that are not necessarily conclusive, but show promise and warrant further examination
- Be careful not to overstate your findings



## Step 8: Communicate Findings

Tips to consider:

- Develop an outline for your report before starting the writing process
- Assume the reader has no prior knowledge
- Make the information visually appealing and easy to read
- Use diagrams, graphs or charts to highlight central findings
- Take steps to ensure the credibility of your evaluation report
- Proofread your report



# Step 8: Communicate Findings

Other Useful Products for Communication:

- Executive summary of final report (5-10 pages)
- Short research briefs (2-4 pages)
  - Graphics and pictures
  - Bulleted information
- Non-technical memos



# Step 9: Apply Findings and Feedback for Program Improvement



Evaluation findings can support decisions and actions with respect to:

- Program design, implementation and effectiveness
- Program improvement
- Implementing change



# Resources on Evaluation

Please visit **ASN's Evaluation Resources** for more information:

- <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/evaluation-resources>

ASN's Evaluation Resources include course on many topics, such as:

- Developing a Logic Model
- Developing Research Questions
- Designing an Evaluation
- Managing an External Evaluation

AmeriCorps Evaluation TA Portal:

<https://americorpsevaluationta.norc.org/>

**Questions?**



# Thank you!

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