Program Evaluation Toolkit
Module 2, Chapter 1: Evaluation
Questions

Regional Educational
Laboratory
Central

From the National Center for Education Evaluation at IES

Speaker 1:

Welcome to the first chapter of the second module of the program evaluation toolkit. Although you can start with any module in the toolkit, it is best to at least review Module 1, which covers logic models, before beginning Module 2. The logic model is the foundation of program evaluation in this toolkit. You will refer to your logic model throughout the toolkit as you develop evaluation questions, choose an evaluation design, select a sample, identify data sources needed to address the questions, develop data collection instruments, finalize an analysis plan, and disseminate findings.

This module includes three chapters, each highlighting a phase in the development of evaluation questions.

Chapter 1 answers the question "How do evaluation questions relate to the logic model?" and describes two types of evaluation questions: process and outcome.

Chapter 2 describes how to write evaluation questions using the PARSEC framework, which stands for pertinent, answerable, reasonable, specific, evaluative, and complete.

Chapter 3 describes the process for prioritizing evaluation questions so that you have an actionable evaluation plan.

Refer to the resources page of the website for worksheets, templates, and other resources to help you develop your own evaluation questions.

Let's get started with the first chapter, which describes how evaluation questions relate to the logic model.

A sound logic model is the foundation for effective program evaluation. A logic model can inform evaluation questions that focus on program improvement and the impact of a program. If you do not have at least a workable logic model yet, return to Module 1 to develop one.

This toolkit focuses on two general types of evaluation questions: process and outcome. Process evaluation questions are concerned with the quality of program implementation and improvement. For example, process evaluation questions might ask "To what extent is the program making use of available resources?" "To what extent are program activities being implemented, as shown in the outputs?" "To what extent is the program being implemented as intended?" or "What were the challenges and facilitators in terms of getting the program up and running?" Process evaluation questions are sometimes called "formative" questions, which

means that they may be answered while a program is underway in order to modify implementation. Process evaluation questions may also be answered after a program is completed in order to understand how well the program worked and what changes may be necessary before repeating or scaling up the program. Answering process evaluation questions after a program is completed may also provide context for interpreting the results of the program. This purpose is discussed further in Module 8.

Outcome evaluation questions are concerned with the impact of a program over time. They can focus on short- and mid-term outcomes, as well as long-term outcomes. These types of questions are sometimes called "summative" questions. They are typically not answered until key program activities have been implemented. For example, these types of questions might ask "To what extent did the program improve students' math scores?" "To what extent did tutors use the program materials in their work with students?" or "To what extent were tutors knowledgeable of the programs' content?"

Here you can see the framework of a logic model and understand how it supports the creation of both types of evaluation questions. Process evaluation questions focus on resources, activities, and outputs, helping to ensure that your program is on track to meet its outcomes. Outcome evaluation questions include everything that you hope your program will accomplish, ranging from short-term outcomes (for example, changes in knowledge or understanding) to long-term outcomes (for example, systemic changes such as increased graduation rates).

Module 1 introduced a fictitious program called AMMP!, which stands for After-School Middle-Grades Math Program. In this example, a middle school has been experiencing low rates of math homework completion among its students. School leaders believe the low homework completion rates are contributing to low math achievement scores. Another issue at the school is high numbers of unsupervised students after school. The school leaders believe that the unsupervised students are contributing to community issues such as vandalism. To address these concerns, the middle school has started the after-school program AMMP!.

AMMP! offers math tutoring, math extension, homework completion support, recreational activities, and field trips during after-school hours.

Here is the example logic model for AMMP!, from Module 1. This logic model, including research citations, is available on the resources page of the website so that you can download it for further examination. You will work with the logic model as you formulate evaluation questions.

AMMP! likely differs from your own program, but using the AMMP! logic model to draft process and outcome evaluation questions can be helpful.

To write process evaluation questions, consider what an evaluation team might want to know about the AMMP! implementation to inform potential changes. One question could focus on the cost of activities. For example, which activities require the most resources? Another question could involve looking at the extent to which each activity is being used. Together, such process

evaluation questions can help to inform decisions about which activities should be kept, changed, or discontinued.

Now, think about the outcome evaluation questions. One of the short-term outcomes for AMMP! is increased tutor knowledge of effective techniques, so a question focusing on the tutors' effectiveness after training would be appropriate. Of course, an evaluation team also wants to see an impact on students, so a question related to homework completion would also be useful in describing successes. Convening a group of stakeholders to discuss the most desirable outcomes of a program may be a useful exercise.

Now that you have considered the AMMP! example, you can return to your own logic model, which you drafted in Module 1, and create at least one process evaluation question and one outcome evaluation question. You will explore these questions further in the following chapters in Module 2. Use the *Identifying Evaluation Questions Worksheet*, available on the resources page of the website, to draft these questions. In that worksheet, you will write your questions, identify the logic model components from which the questions originated, and categorize the questions as process or outcome questions.

Next, in chapter 2, you will revise the evaluation questions, using the PARSEC framework, which stands for pertinent, answerable, reasonable, specific, evaluative, and complete.