What are evaluation questions?

Distinguishing between overarching evaluation questions and survey questions for evaluation tools can sometimes be challenging and overwhelming. Below we offer a brief explanation of evaluation questions.

Evaluation questions guide the overall evaluation and help you to answer the big questions you have about your program or initiative. These are questions you ask of yourself as the evaluator. Evaluation questions drive the evaluation plan and point to the types of data to collect and how best to collect it.

Often evaluation questions ask whether we have achieved what we set out to achieve with the program, such as:

- What do participants gain from the program?
- To what extent have we reached the goals of the initiative?

However, you may have other big questions about your program or initiative, such as:

- What activities seem to be most helpful to participants?
- Who are we reaching in our program? Are we reaching our target audience?

Evaluation questions align with the desired short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of our efforts and help us to determine whether we have actually achieved those outcomes. An example of an evaluation question to assess short-term, knowledge-based outcomes for a specific PFT action plan may be:

- What knowledge did participants gain about issues facing older adults?

In an individual’s action plan, an agent or specialist would likely focus on only particular programs or pieces of a program focus area. For an individual action plan, an evaluation question for medium-term, behavior-focused outcomes may be:

- Three to six months after participating in a soil management program, what conservation tillage practices are participants using?
**THINK: WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE PLAN?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short-term goals</th>
<th>Mid-term goals</th>
<th>Long-term goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The immediate effects of program participation, such as changes in awareness, knowledge, understanding, interest, or attitudes.</td>
<td>Intermediate effects that result from having gained the short-term outcomes, such as changes in participants' behaviors or practices.</td>
<td>Changes in participants' broader condition that are typically more distant in time, less attributable directly to the program, and more difficult to measure.</td>
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**WHAT DO EVALUATION QUESTIONS DO?**

- **Guide the overall evaluation.**
- **Help you answer big questions about your program or initiative.**
- **Drive the evaluation plan.**
- **Point to the type of data collect and how to best collect it.**

**DID YOU ACHIEVE WHAT YOU SET OUT TO ACHIEVE?**

- What do participants gain from the program?
- To what extent have we reached the initiative goals?

**EXTRA TIPS**

- Focus on only particular programs or pieces of a program focus area.
- When developing evaluation questions, keep in mind what you initially set out to do.

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