

Asking the Important Questions

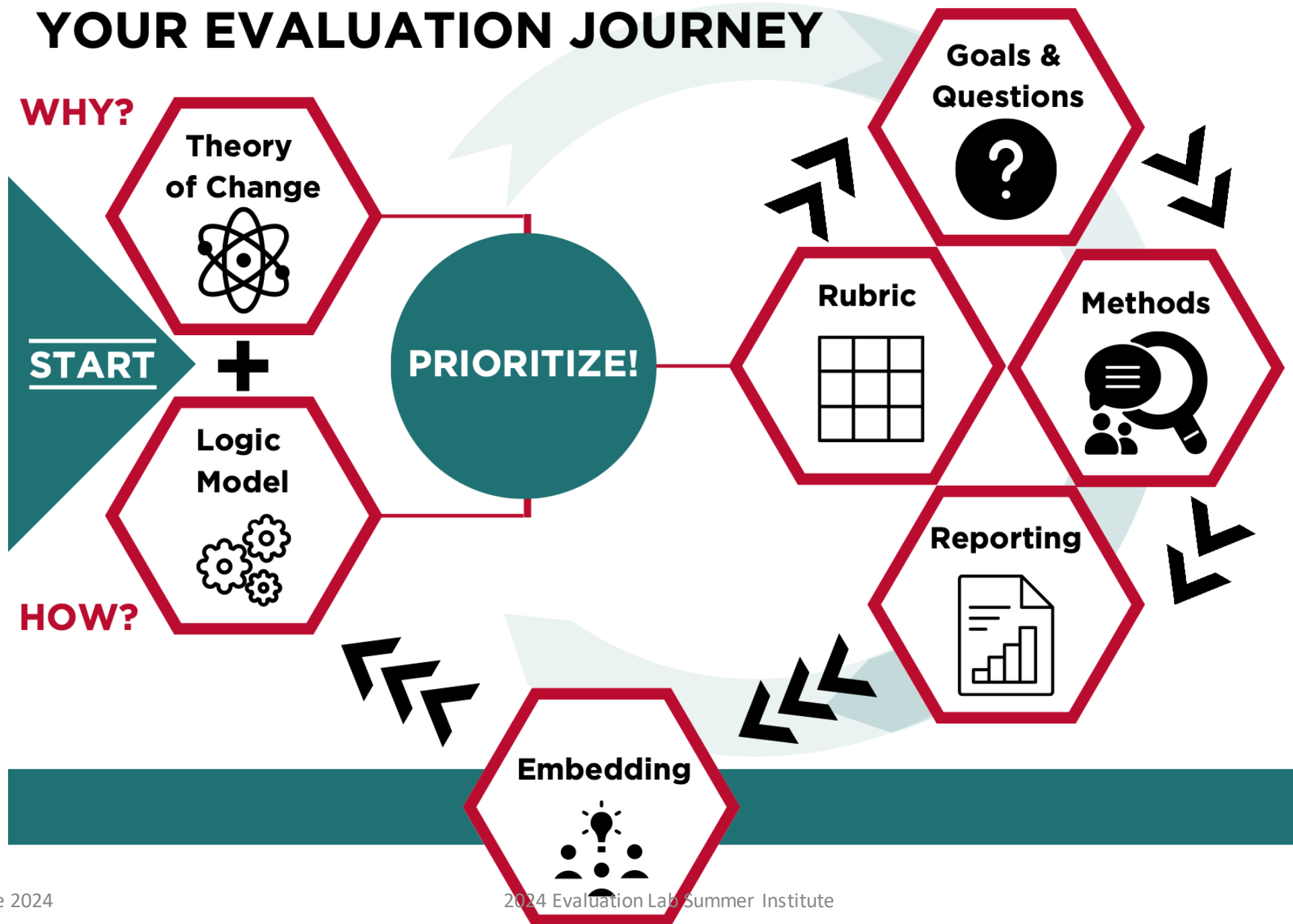
Evaluation Lab 2024 Summer Institute

Audrey Cooper, MPH, RN

11 June 2024



YOUR EVALUATION JOURNEY



Focusing the Evaluation: Objective

By the end of today, you will

- Identify key stakeholders
- Use your mission to center what really matters to your organization
- Draft evaluation goals and questions

A collaborative approach: identifying stakeholders

Stakeholders are people and organizations invested in your work such as:

- Clients/patients/participants/service recipients
- Board of Directors
- Staff
- Funders
- Collaborating partners
- Community leaders
- Who else?

Why a collaborative approach?

- Creates buy-in
- Builds capacity
- Richer, more thoughtful evaluation
- More likely to put together the pieces to ask questions and implement the evaluation:
 - Knowledge
 - Skills
 - Insights

What *really* matters?

- What would help your organization do its work?
- What would make your program more effective?
- If your mission was achieved, what would that look like? How can you get there? What is your part?

Mission is is not just an idea but a focusing point, a north star to navigate you.

Knowing where to go prevents you from going adrift.

What *really* matters?

If all that mattered was your mission, what evaluation questions would you ask?

"Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning." Gloria Steinem

What gets in the way of what really matters?

- The way we've always done it
- Expectations from funders, boards, etc.
- The idea of “should”

Solutions: Having multiple stakeholders at the table helps represent multiple interests and form collectively meaningful questions.

Asking useful and meaningful questions

Obtaining useful and meaningful evaluation goals and questions means asking:

What do you want to evaluate?

Why is this important?

Who will use the results?

How will the results be used?

Will the results serve your mission?

Scenario

A community organization focused on HIV prevention holds monthly information sharing meetings.

They gather together community partners to share the latest medical data and treatment options, community event details, and work community organizations are doing to support HIV prevention efforts.

Mission: to dismantle barriers to information access through creating a collaborative, welcoming space to share ideas and information.

Scenario (continued)

The organization collects data about who attends the meetings:

- Organization name
- Organization type
- Who is representing the organization including title
- Dates of attendance
- Number of people per organization

Scenario (continued)

The organization wants to know:

- Is the meeting making a difference to the community?
- Are attendees using the information within their organizations?
- Does the meeting enhance the ability of the attendees to do their work?
- How effective is the meeting format to meeting the mission?
- Besides this meeting, are there other ways we can dismantle barriers to information access?

Mission: to dismantle barriers to information access through creating a collaborative, welcoming space to share ideas and information.

Tips for getting started

We strongly recommend:

A collaborative approach incorporating key stakeholders.

Develop shared understanding of the program, its priorities, and how the evaluation fits.

Can yield most usable results.

Keep your mission in sight and in mind. Write it at the top of your brainstorm.

It will guide your process when things get confusing.

Team discussion: who should be at the table?

The most evident stakeholders:

Program managers, designers, staff implementing the program, admin staff.

Consider:

Former and potential clients, if possible.

Team discussion

Step 1: Identify key stakeholders

Each person will answer:

Who is important to our organization or program?

Ask yourself: Who's missing?

Tip: Not every stakeholder provides value to all evaluations. See if you can prioritize who is at the table and why.

Team discussion

Step 2: Mission and Program Outcomes

Be sure everyone knows the mission and can see it.

Tip: write the mission at the top of your working document.

Once you all have shared understanding of organization or program outcomes and mission:

Decide on priorities

- Each team member can express which outcomes take priority for evaluation and why.
- Pick the outcome that most agree upon **as a starting point.**

Team discussion

Step 2: What do you Want to Know?

Once you decide on what you will evaluate, each team member can express:

What do they wish to learn from the evaluation?

If the team is having a hard time answering this, think about a statement you wish you could make about your organization.

Example: Mandy's Farm statement of success in daily living for its clients:

“Adults with disabilities exert full control over where they live, where they work, and who they spend time with”

You may have these statements in your rubric! Feel free to use them but you don't have to.

Team discussion

Step 2: What do you Want to Know?

Once you have identified what you want to know, you can express them as evaluation goals (it is just a draft! You can revise it as you go!)

“The goal of this evaluation is to **learn** how much control do clients have over their financial decisions and personal relationships”

“The goal of this evaluation is to **assess** how effective is the training program in supporting teachers to plan, create, and implement an arts-based STEM online curriculum”

Team discussion

Step 3: The Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions reflect your evaluation goal.

They also define the scope or boundaries of your evaluation .

Make sure your evaluation questions are:

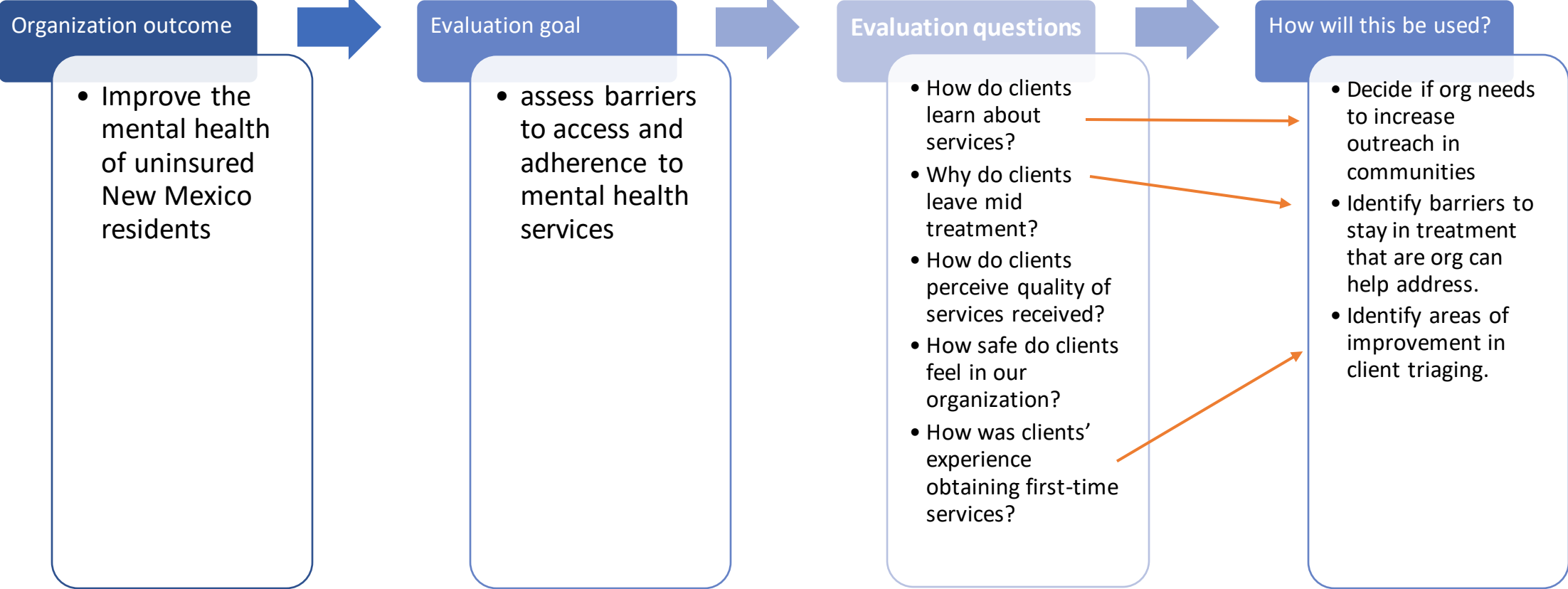
- Directly related to your evaluation goal
- Open ended*
- Helpful for decision making.

* This depends on the evaluation goal but tends to be the most effective type of question if you want useful answers.

Example 1:



Example 2:



Team discussion: use of findings

Discuss with your team:

What decisions will the evaluation findings influence? (Staffing? Funding? Program design? Nothing?)

Who will make the decisions?

When should results be available to help decision making?

How much influence do you expect the evaluation to have? (be as realistic as you can!)

→ What kind of data do you need for the evaluation to have the influence you want it to have?

It is a learning process

About how you and your team see your program/organization

About what you want to know about your organization

About what you want to do next!

The process is not linear!

e.g., You might need to go back and tweak your evaluation goal once you start thinking about evaluation questions and the decisions you want to make.

Evaluation Questions vs Survey Questions

Evaluation Questions	Survey Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="191 444 1268 646">• Broad: think about your mission or the mission of the program you want to evaluate<li data-bbox="191 746 1136 949">• Example: What is the relationship between students' presence and student learning outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="1304 444 2321 718">• Narrow: Gets at a very specific piece of information related to how a participant thinks about, feels, or views an issue<li data-bbox="1304 746 2339 1021">• Example: Students learn best in my classroom when they attend at least: 1 day per week, 2 days per week, 3 days per week