

NORC at the University of Chicago

# Developing a Long-Term Research Agenda

# Learning Objectives



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

- Recognize the importance of building a long-term research agenda
- Identify the various stages in building evidence of a program's effectiveness
- Understand the key questions to consider prior to developing a long-term research agenda for your program

# **PART 1**

## **Defining a Long-term Research Agenda**

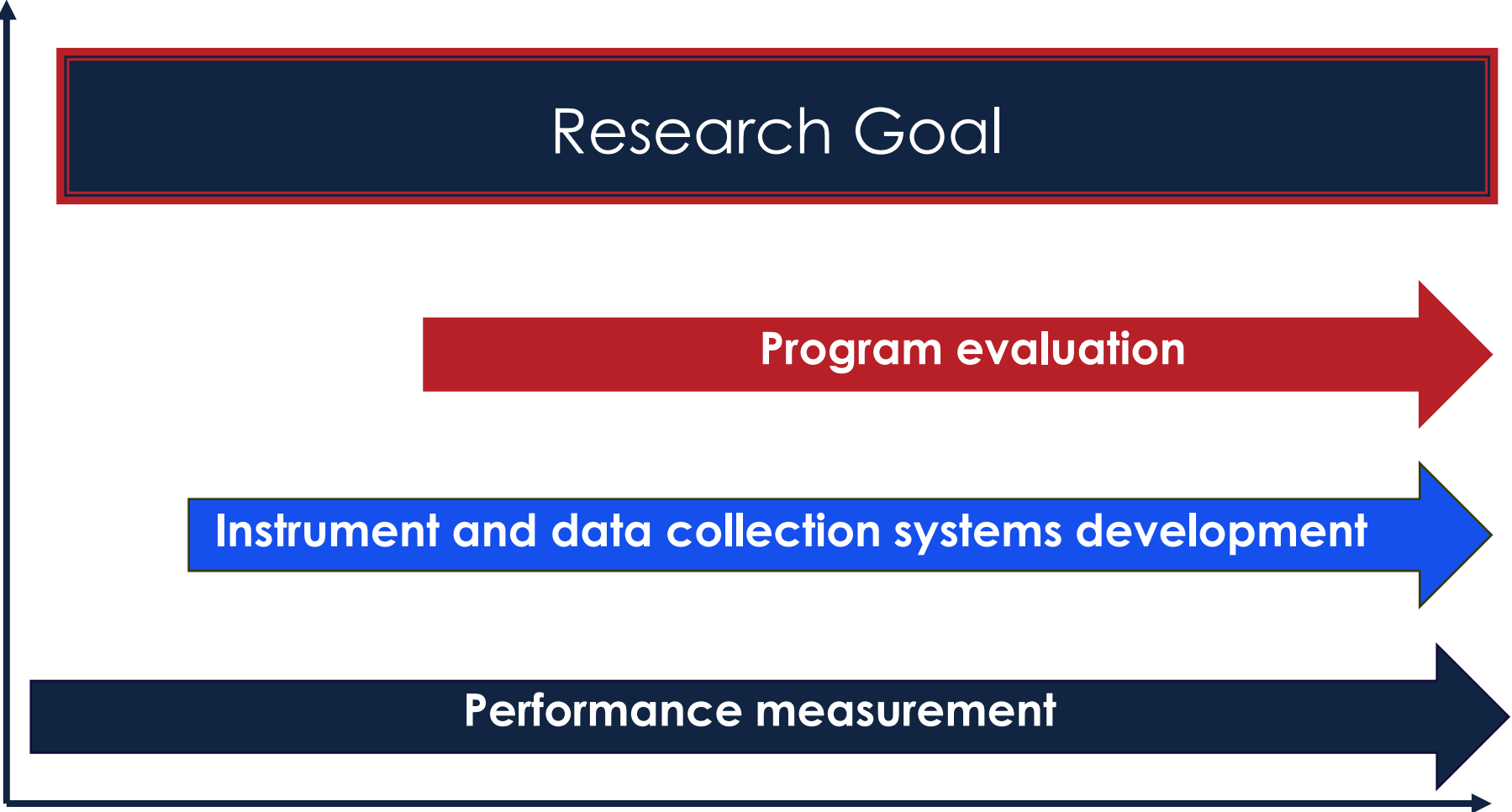




# What is a Long-term Research Agenda?

- A long-term research agenda is a series of intentional or planned program evaluations and research tools that build towards addressing a research goal.
- Similar to a strategic plan, a research agenda generally spans over several years.
- A research agenda is unique and should be tailored to each individual program.
- A research agenda is a dynamic tool (i.e., a living document) that should be revised/updated based on new evidence, shifts in program direction, etc.

# Long-term Research Agenda



# Why is it Important to Have a Long-term Research Agenda?



- A research agenda sets clear goals for what program stakeholders want or need to know about the program years into the future
- A research agenda defines your destination, then identifies the supporting steps that will get you there
- A research agenda continues to build evidence of program effectiveness
- A research agenda demonstrates strategic investment of funds in evaluation activities



# Build a Long-term Research Agenda

- What does a long-term research agenda look like?
  - What do we want to have learned 5 years from now? 10 years from now?
  - Work backwards: define your destination, then name the supporting steps that will get you there
  - Each evaluation should build on what you learned previously
  - If you invest evaluation money strategically, scarce resources can have a big impact

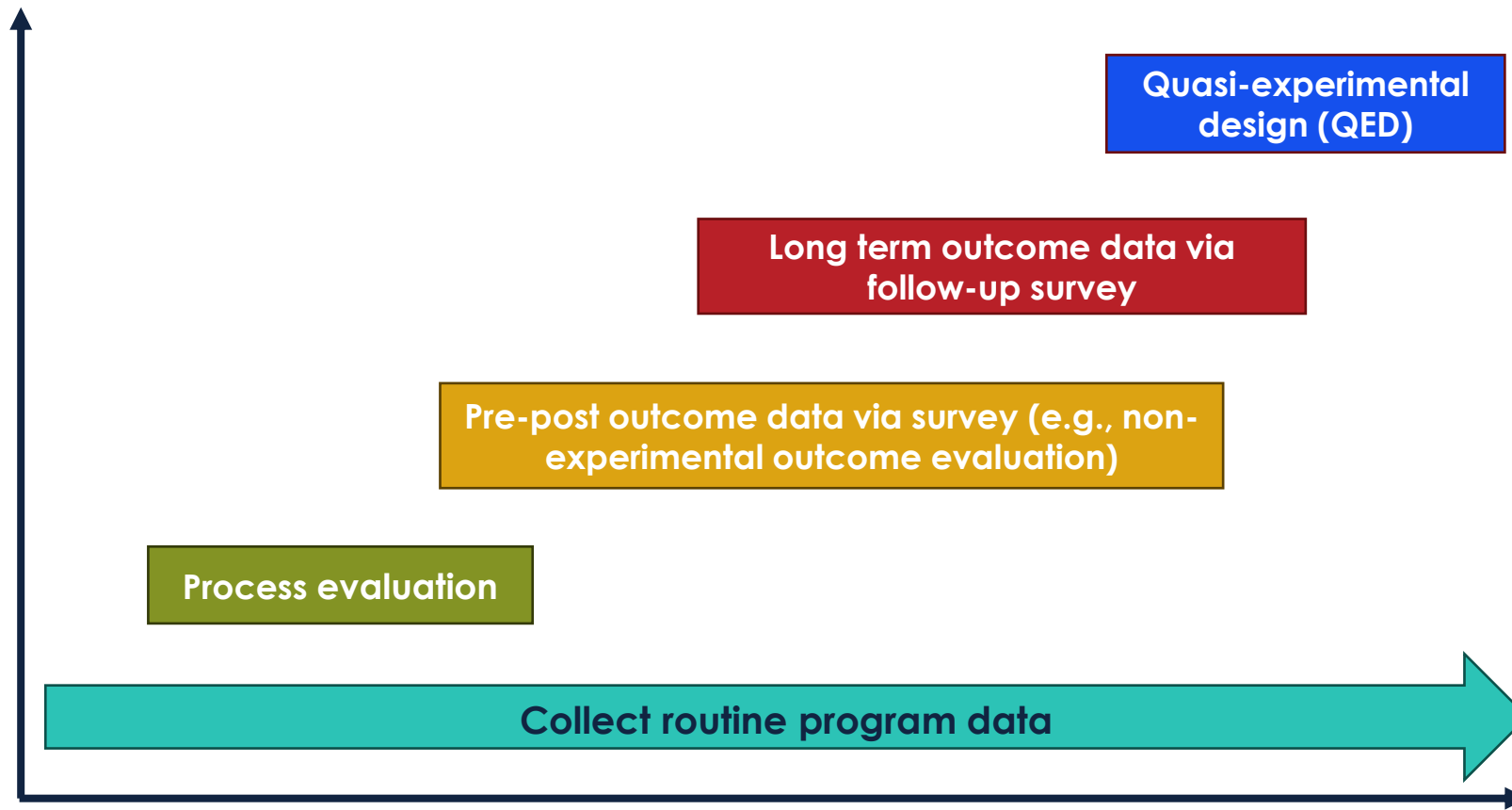
# Example of a Long-term Research Agenda



- AmeriCorps Housing Assistance Program
- Goal: Demonstrate that the program has a positive impact on beneficiaries via an impact evaluation or quasi-experimental evaluation.
  - **Step 1:** Collect program data, routinely, on family background characteristics and number of families served.
  - **Step 2:** Process study: Is the program being implemented with fidelity to the model?
  - **Step 3:** Collect pre/post outcome data each year via annual survey.
  - **Step 4:** In addition to data collected from Steps 1&2, collect long-term outcomes data via follow-up survey (1 year post- program)
  - **Step 5:** Local demand for program services exceeds the services provided by the program, so identify other local public and private sources providing services to similar families to serve as a comparison group and conduct a quasi-experimental design (QED study).



# Example: Stages in a Long-term Research Agenda



- **Program:** AmeriCorps program provides housing assistance for low-income families.
- **Research Goal:** Demonstrate that the program has a positive impact on beneficiaries via a quasi-experimental design (QED)

# What to Consider When Developing a Long-term Research Agenda



- Program maturity
  - How long the program has been in operation
- Existing evidence base
  - Evidence that has already been generated on the program that the long-term research agenda should build off
- Funder requirements and other stakeholder needs
  - AmeriCorps has evaluation requirements for some of its grantees, and those requirements should affect a program's decisions about its long-term research agenda
  - Sometimes the same evaluation can meet the needs and requirements of multiple funders

# What to Consider When Developing a Long-term Research Agenda



- Long-term program goals
  - A long-term research agenda should be designed to systematically provide information that supports a program's long-term strategic goals
- Long-term research goals
  - Programs should have long-term research goals that relate to building evidence of effectiveness over time
- Evaluation budget
  - The amount of the program's funding base that will set aside for evaluation activities each year or each grant period

# Exercise Part I: Key Considerations in Developing a Long-term Research Agenda for Your AmeriCorps Program



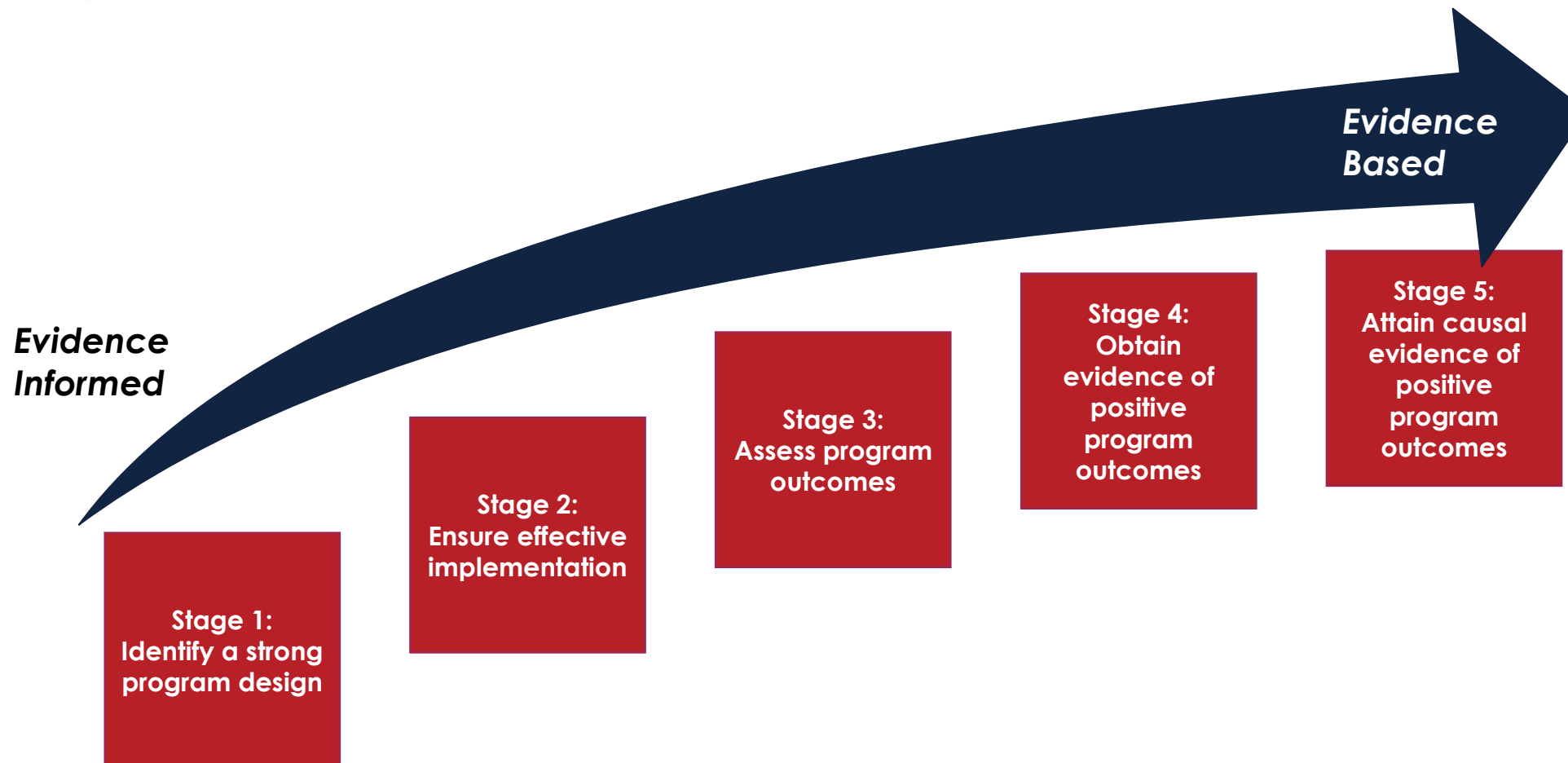
Your AmeriCorps program	
Program maturity	
Existing evidence	
Funder requirements	
Long-term program goals	
Long-term research goals	
Evaluation budget	

# **PART 2**

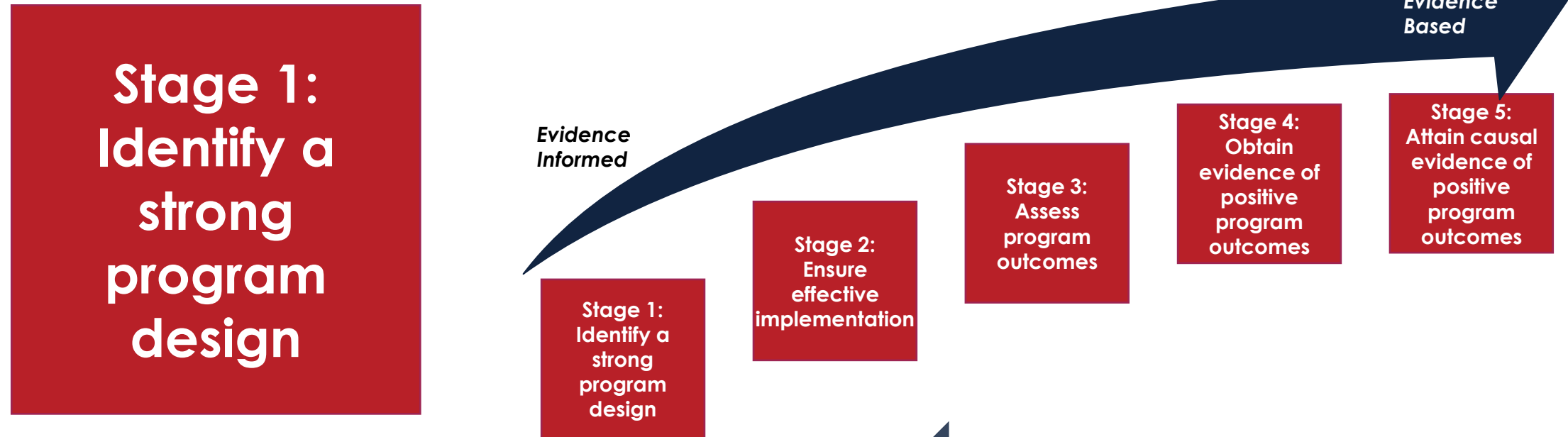
## **Building Evidence of Effectiveness**



# Building Evidence of Effectiveness



# Stage 1: What is the Program Model and What is it Supposed to do?



**Gather evidence to support program design  
(e.g., conduct a literature review and/or needs  
assessment)**

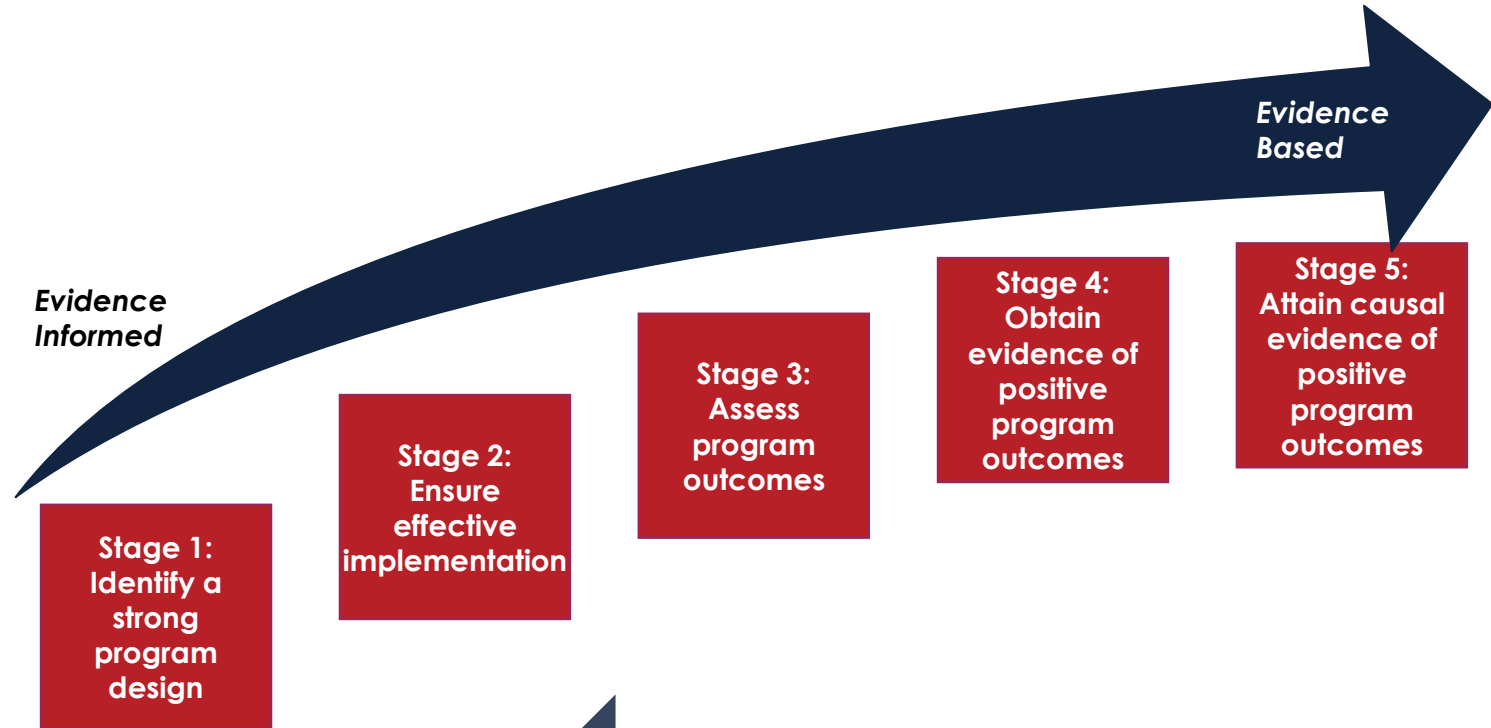
**Develop logic model**

**Pilot program**

# Stage 1: What is the Program Model and What is it Supposed to do?



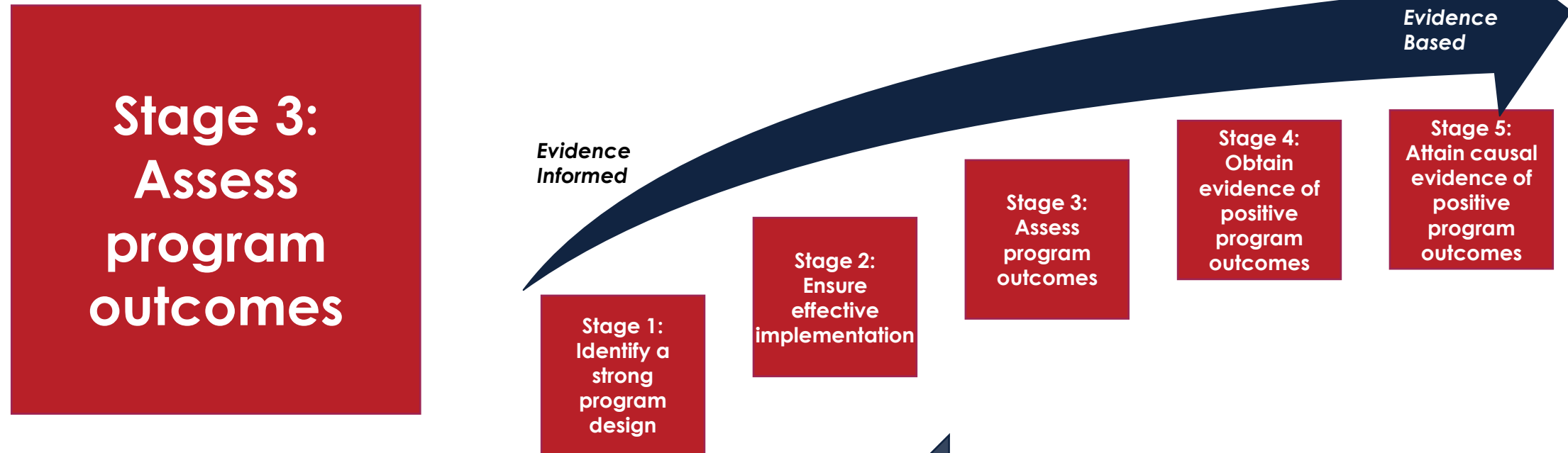
**Stage 2:  
Ensure  
effective  
implementation**



**Output performance measurement  
Process evaluation**

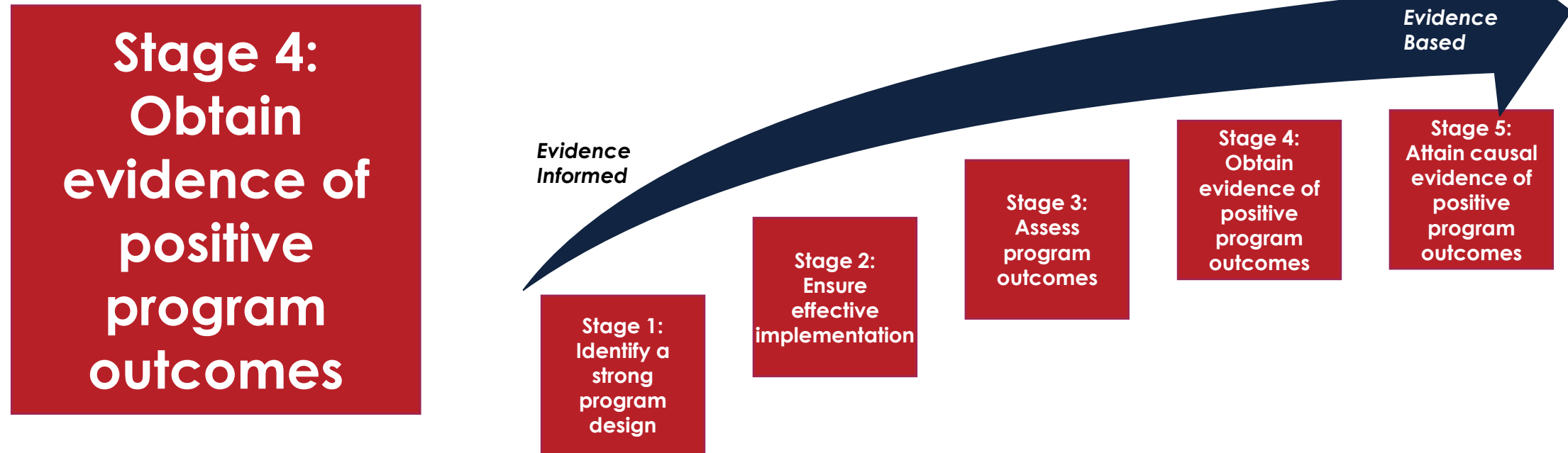


# Stage 1: What is the Program Model and What is it Supposed to do?



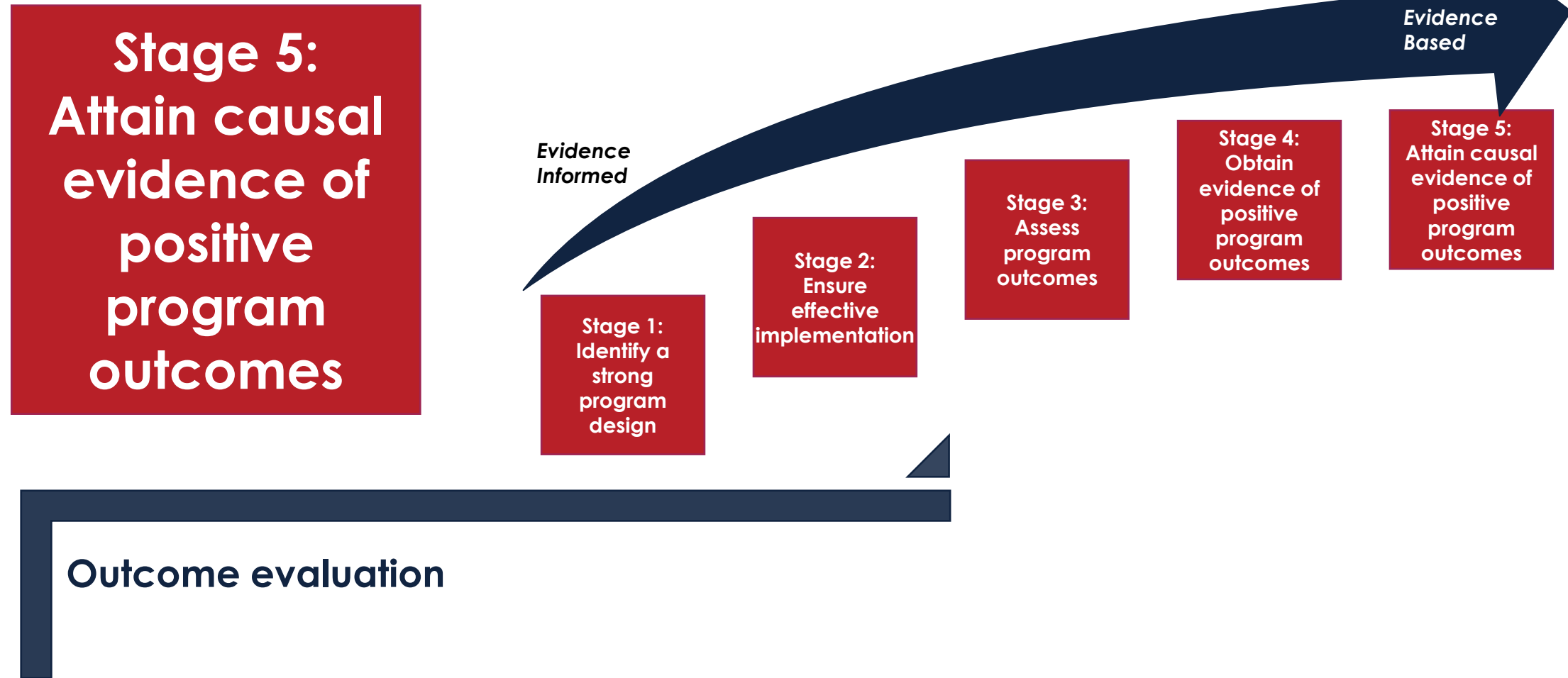
Measure program outcomes (e.g., non-experimental evaluation design)

# Stage 1: What is the Program Model and What is it Supposed to do?

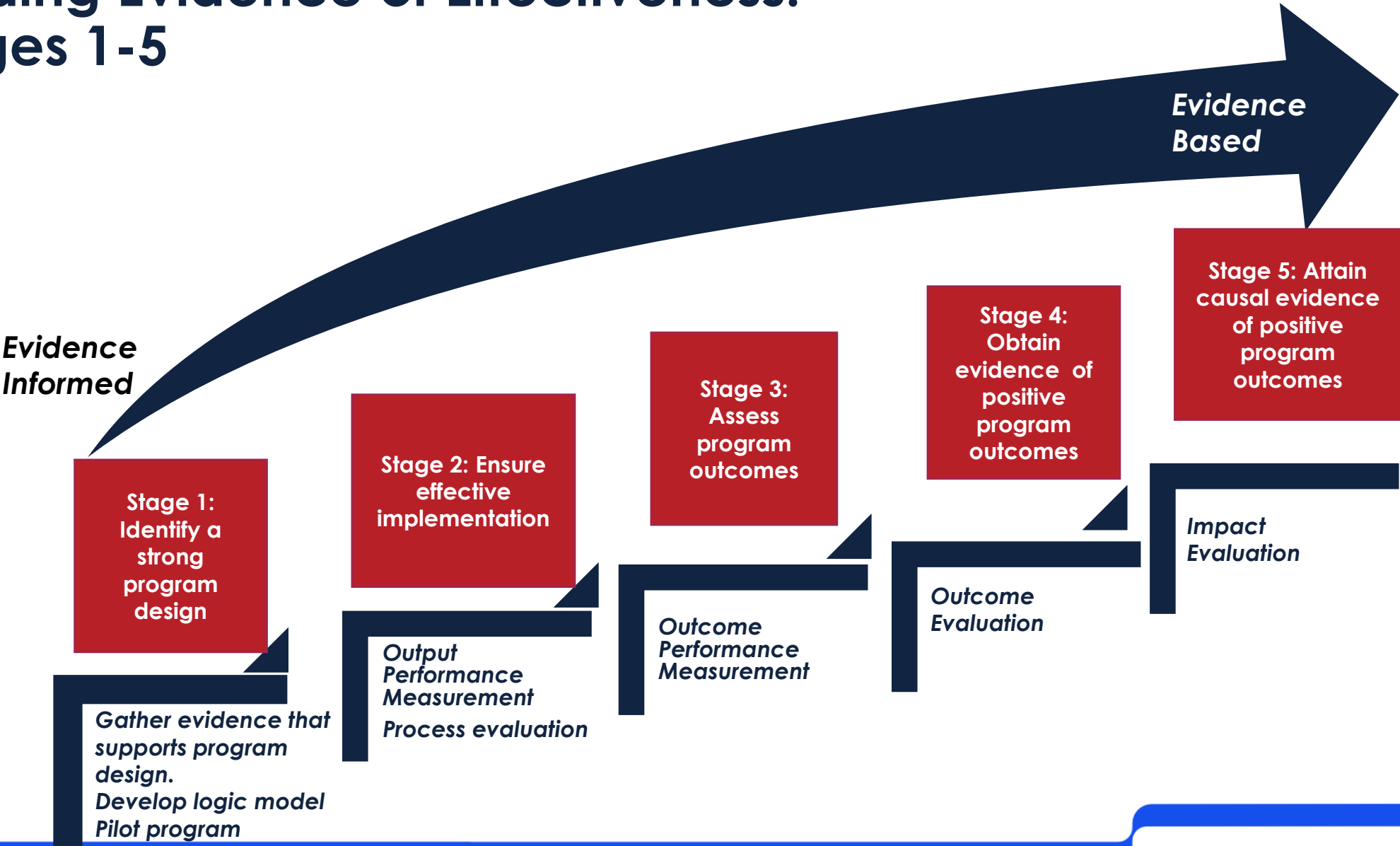


Impact evaluation (e.g., quasi-experimental design, experimental design)

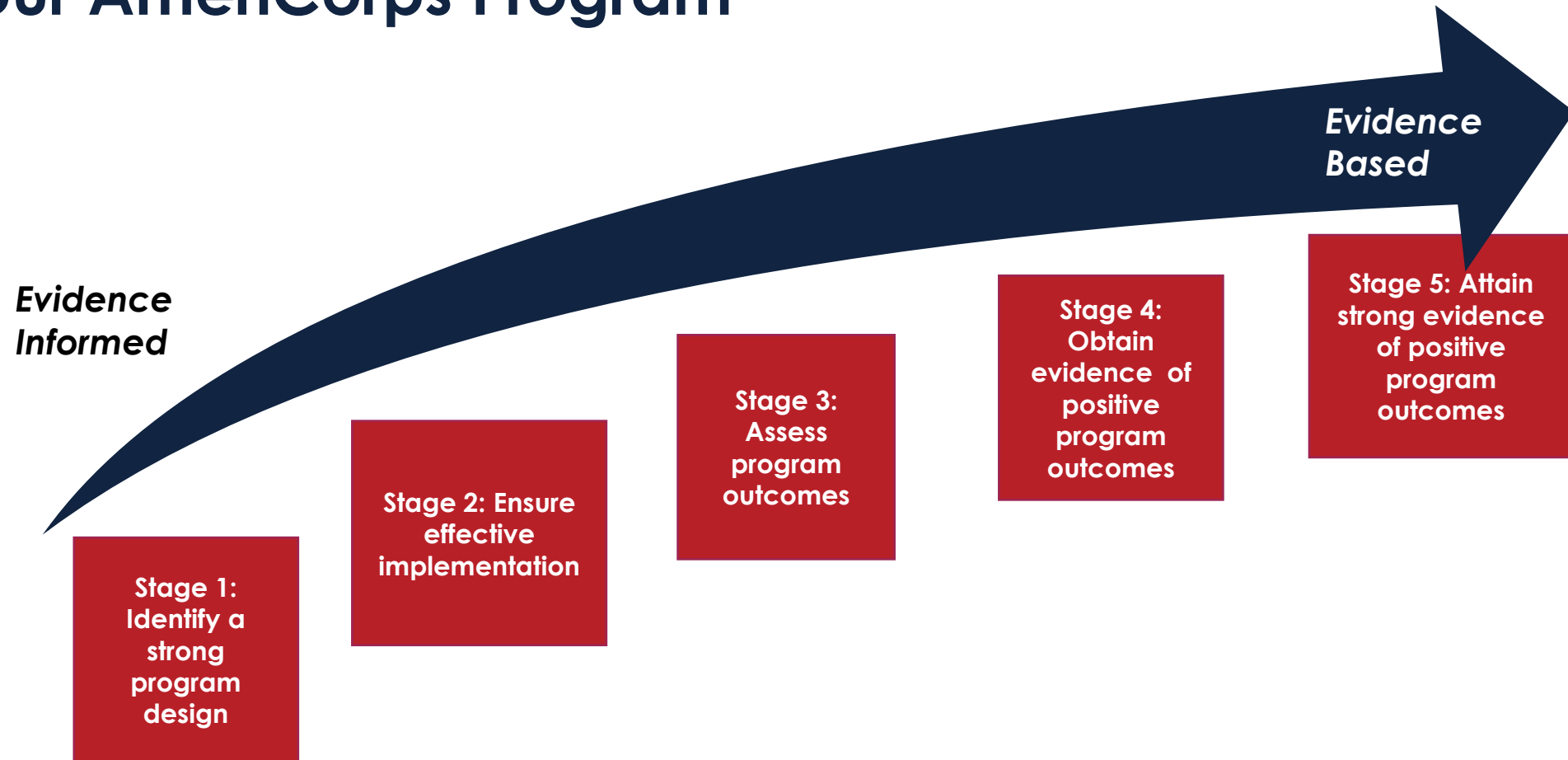
# Stage 1: What is the Program Model and What is it Supposed to do?



# Building Evidence of Effectiveness: Stages 1-5



# Exercise Part II: Building Evidence of Effectiveness for Your AmeriCorps Program

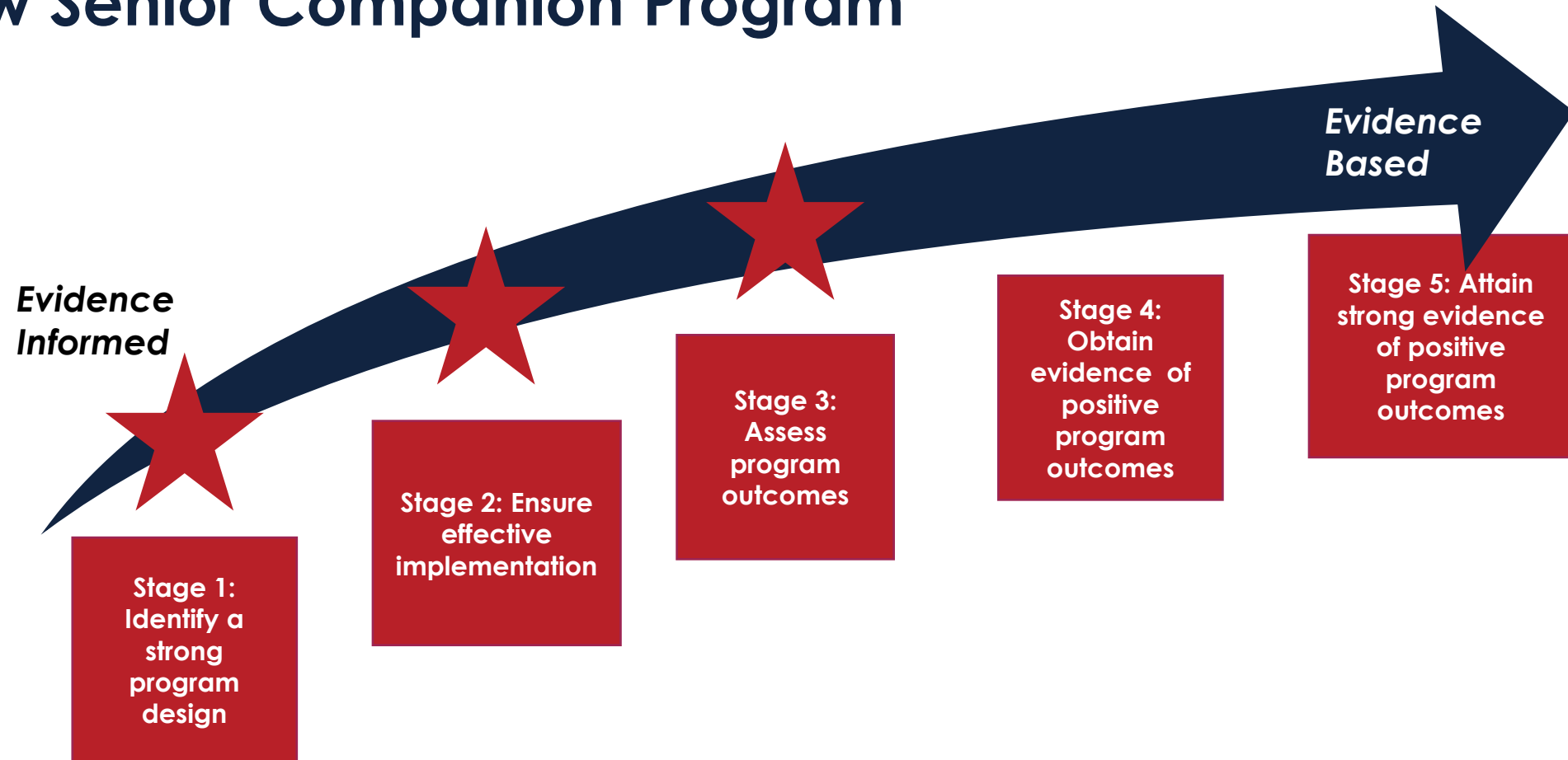


# PART 3

## Example Scenarios



# Scenario 1: Building a Long-term Research Agenda for a New Senior Companion Program



# Scenario 1: Logic Model for a Senior Companion Program (SCP)



## 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 4 FT Staff 30 SCP volunteers Training	Provide independent living services (transportation, nutrition/food support, assistance with medical appointments, etc.)  Provide companionship services	50 older adults received transportation services  45 older adults received nutrition/food support, assistance with medical appointments  30 older adults received companionship services	Older adults experience improved capacity for independent living.  Older adults experience increases in social support.  SCP volunteers experience increased feelings of social-connectedness.	Older adults experience increased social and instrumental support.  Older adults experience decreases in stress, anxiety, and depression.  SCP volunteers experience feelings of making a positive impact.	Older adults experience greater levels of independence.  Older adults experience increases in overall health and well-being.  SCP volunteers experience increases in overall health.



# Scenario 1: Key Considerations in Developing a Long-term Research Agenda



## New, Senior Companion Program

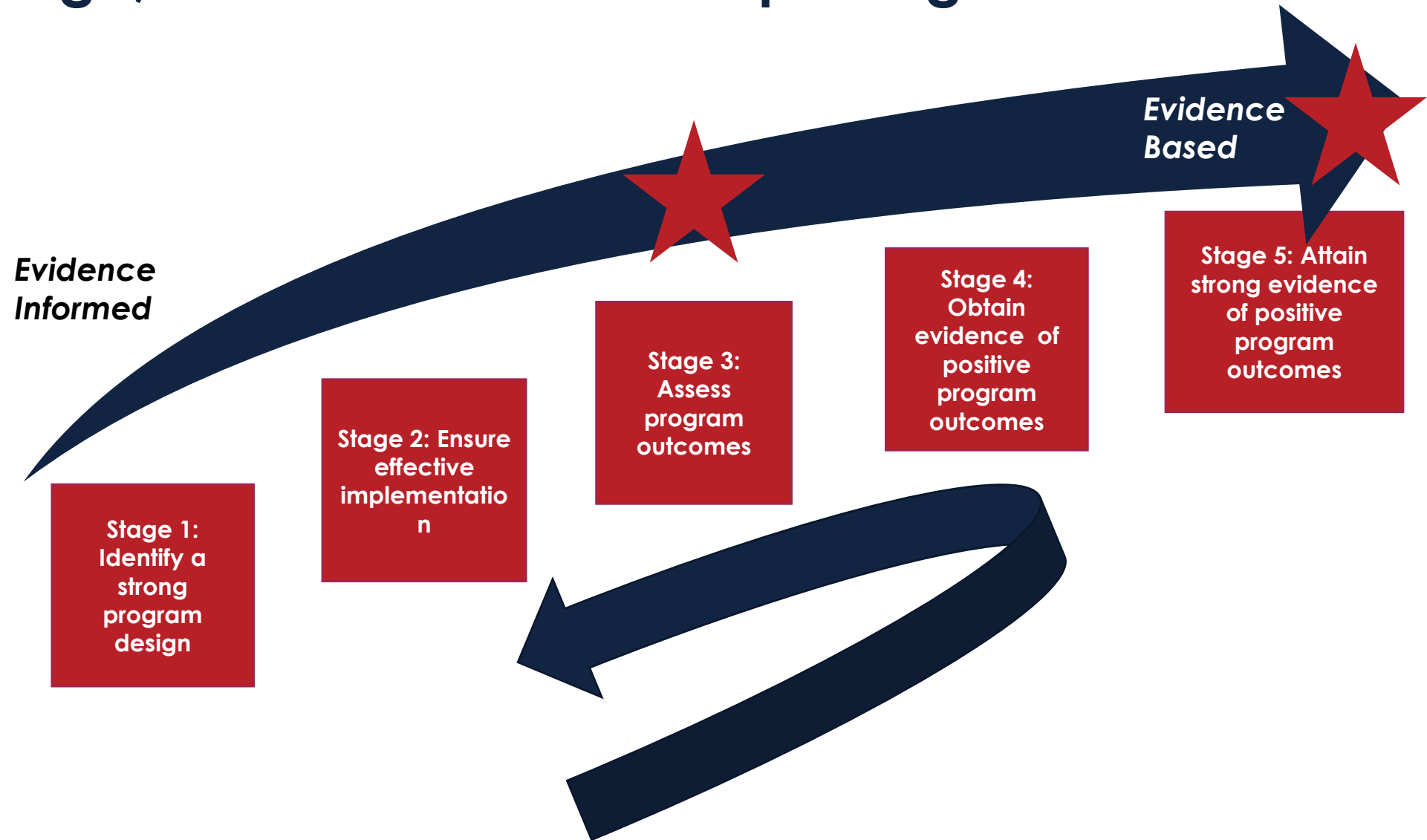
<b>Program maturity</b>	AmeriCorps grantee with no prior years of program implementation. Operating in only one community site.
<b>Existing evidence</b>	The program's evidence falls in the first stage on the continuum as it has conducted a literature review to determine best practices for implementing core service activities. No evaluations have been conducted on the program.
<b>Funder requirements</b>	AmeriCorps Seniors grantees are required to report national performance measures; grantees have no explicit evaluation requirements.
<b>Long-term program goals</b>	Achieve full program operation with efficiency and fidelity to the program's central model. Realize all expected program outcomes.
<b>Long-term research goals</b>	Generate data to facilitate program improvements and ensure an efficient, full operation of the program's service activities. Generate data on the program's short- and medium-term outcomes (see logic model).
<b>Evaluation budget</b>	10% of the program's annual funding has been set aside for evaluation activities.

# Scenario 1: Long-term Research Agenda for a Senior Companion Program (SCP)



Evaluation activities		Stage of evidence
1	Develop a logic model and a detailed program implementation plan.	1: Identify strong program design
2	Create a data system to routinely collect performance measurement data and background data on program beneficiaries and SCP volunteers. Program staff and SCP volunteers begin routine data collection activities.	2: Ensure effective implementation and develop data collection plan
3	Develop a survey to collect short-term outcome data, focusing on beneficiaries' capacity for independent living and increases in social support. SCP volunteers administer pre/post surveys to program beneficiaries and analyze data.	3: Assess program outcomes
4	Conduct an internal process evaluation to determine if the program is being implemented with fidelity to the central model. Make data-driven adjustments to the program's implementation as needed.	2: Ensure effective implementation
5	Conduct a non-experimental outcome evaluation using an external evaluator, measuring both short-term and medium-term outcomes.	3: Assess program outcomes

# Scenario 2: Building a Long-term Research Agenda for a Large, Established AmeriCorps Program



# Scenario 2: Example Logic Model for Large, Established, Environmental Restoration Program



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  200 AmeriCorps State and National members  200 non-AmeriCorps volunteers  Research	Conduct forest enhancement and restoration  Complete up-keep activities to enable native plants to survive	Install 100,000 native trees and shrubs on public land  Remove 50% of invasive plant species on 10 forest sites	Increase diversity and coverage of native plant species  Reduce presence of invasive plant species	Improve habitat spaces for wildlife  Increase survival rate of native plant species and wildlife	Maintain conservation of healthy, productive, sustainable ecosystems

# Scenario 2: Key Considerations in Developing a Long-term Research Agenda



## Large, Established ASN Environmental Restoration Program

<b>Program maturity</b>	AmeriCorps grantee in its second three-year AmeriCorps grant cycle. Already operating in multiple sites and expects to add additional service sites.
<b>Existing evidence</b>	Established data collection processes to collect performance measurement output and outcome data. Conducted internal process evaluation yielding evidence that the program is being implemented with fidelity in most service sites.
<b>Funder requirements</b>	Large grantees must conduct an external impact evaluation by the end of their second grant cycle. Large grantees are required to submit an impact evaluation report AND an evaluation plan for a future evaluation with their re-compete application after completing two or more three-year cycles.
<b>Long-term program goals</b>	Achieve and maintain fidelity of program implementation across all existing sites and any new service sites. Build stronger evidence of effectiveness to support future requests for higher levels of funding to expand program operations.
<b>Long-term research goals</b>	Conduct an external impact evaluation to assess the program's short- and medium-term outcomes. Four to six years is the minimum amount of time for program outcomes to be realized. For this reason, the grantee will submit a request for an alternative evaluation approach for timing considerations.
<b>Evaluation budget</b>	15% of the grantee's annual funding has been set aside for evaluation activities. Grantee is seeking additional outside funding for the impact evaluation.

## Scenario 2: Long-term research agenda for large, established environmental restoration program



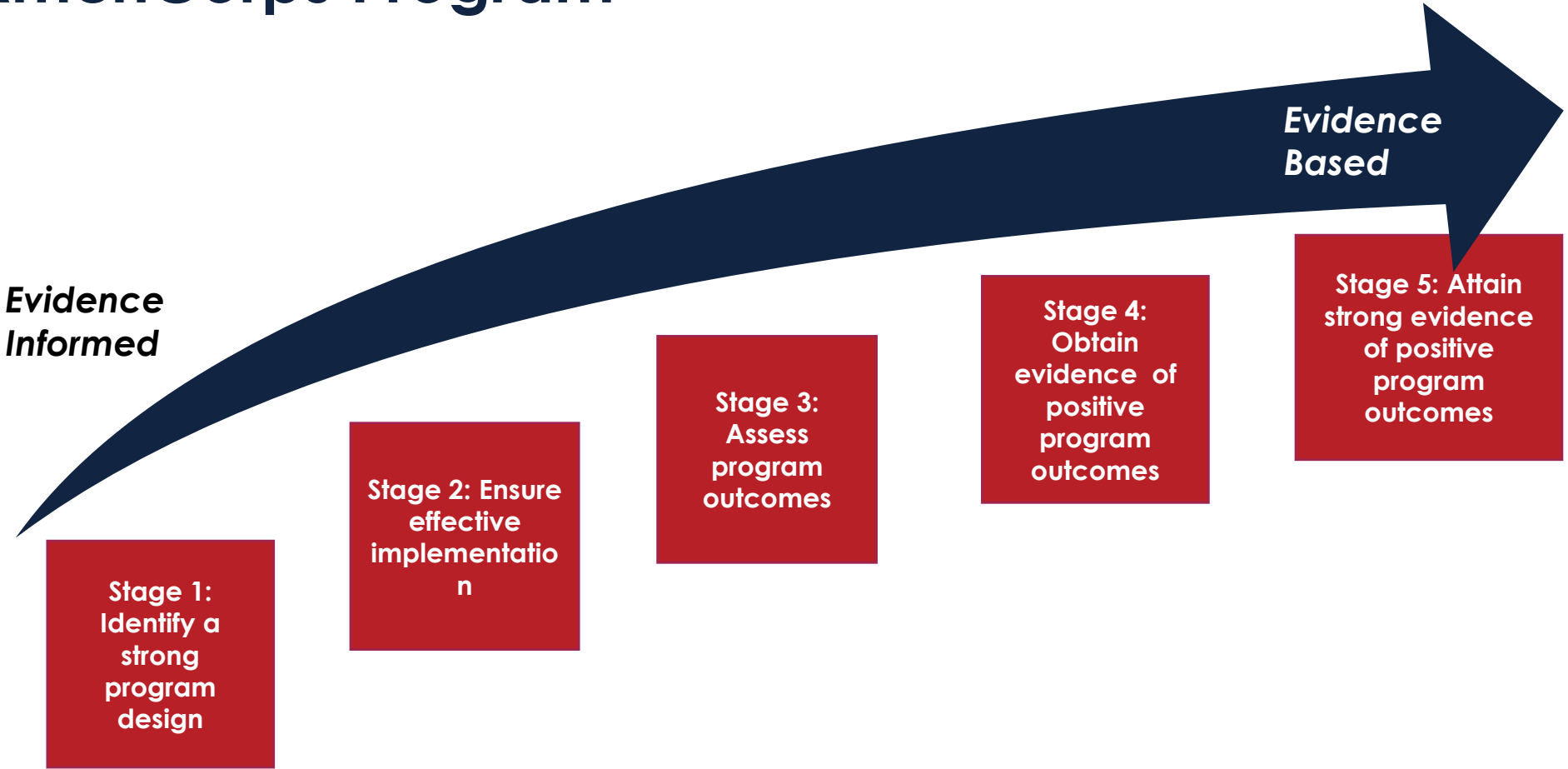
Evaluation activities		Stage of evidence	Grant cycle
1	Conduct a quasi-experimental design (QED) study using an external evaluator, measuring all short- and medium-term outcomes over a six-year time frame and relative to a matched comparison group of sites (i.e., adjacent non-serviced areas that are similar to the pre-restoration conditions at the treatment sites).	5: Obtain evidence of positive program outcomes	2+3
2	Continue to collect and analyze output and outcome performance measurement data on an annual basis.	3: Assess program outcomes	2, 3, 4, etc.
3	Conduct an internal process evaluation focusing on new service sites to determine if the program's new restoration projects are being implemented with fidelity to the central model. Make data-driven adjustments to the program's implementation as needed.	2: Ensure effective implementation	2

# Part 4

## Exercise



# Exercise: Building Evidence of Effectiveness for Your AmeriCorps Program



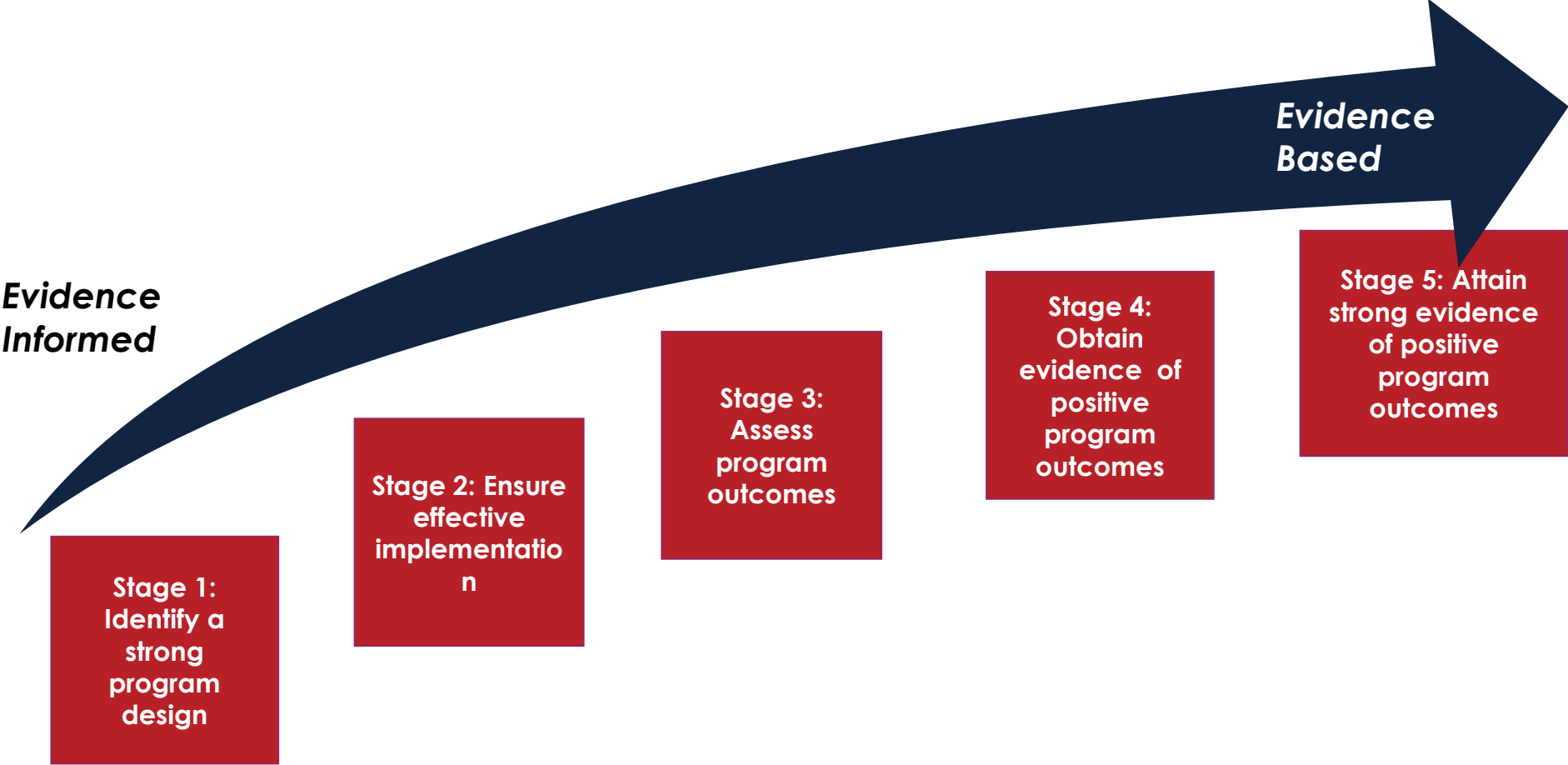


# Exercise Part I: Key Considerations in Developing a Long-term Research Agenda for Your AmeriCorps Program



Your AmeriCorps program	
Program maturity	
Existing evidence	
Funder requirements	
Long-term program goals	
Long-term research goals	
Evaluation budget	

# Exercise Part II: Building Evidence of Effectiveness for Your AmeriCorps Program



# Exercise Part III: Long-term Research Agenda for Your AmeriCorps Program



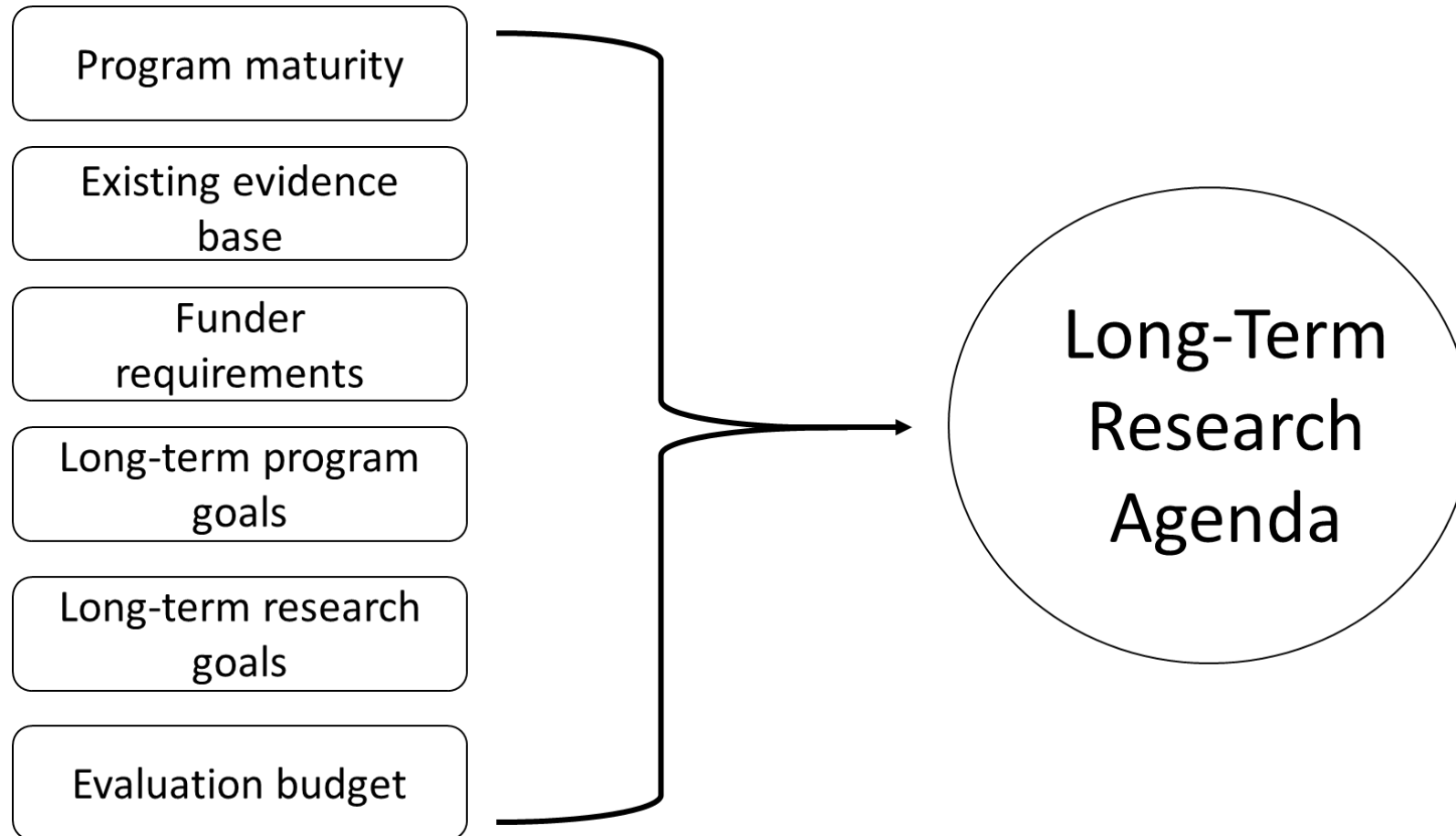
Evaluation activities		Stage of evidence	Grant cycle
1			
2			
3			
4			

# Important Points to Remember



- A long-term research agenda is a developmental approach to evaluation whereby evidence of effectiveness is built over time.
- A long-term research agenda is unique and should be tailored to fit each individual program.
- There is value to building evidence at all stages along the continuum.
- A long-term research agenda should reflect an iterative process where evidence is built gradually over time.

# Key Points to Consider When Developing a Long-term Research Agenda



# Resources



- AmeriCorps Resources  
<https://www.americorps.gov/grantees-sponsors/evaluation-resources>
- The American Evaluation Association: <http://www.eval.org>
- The Evaluation Center: <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/>
- Innovation Network's Point K Learning Center:  
<http://www.innonet.org>

**Questions?**



# Thank you!

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