

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

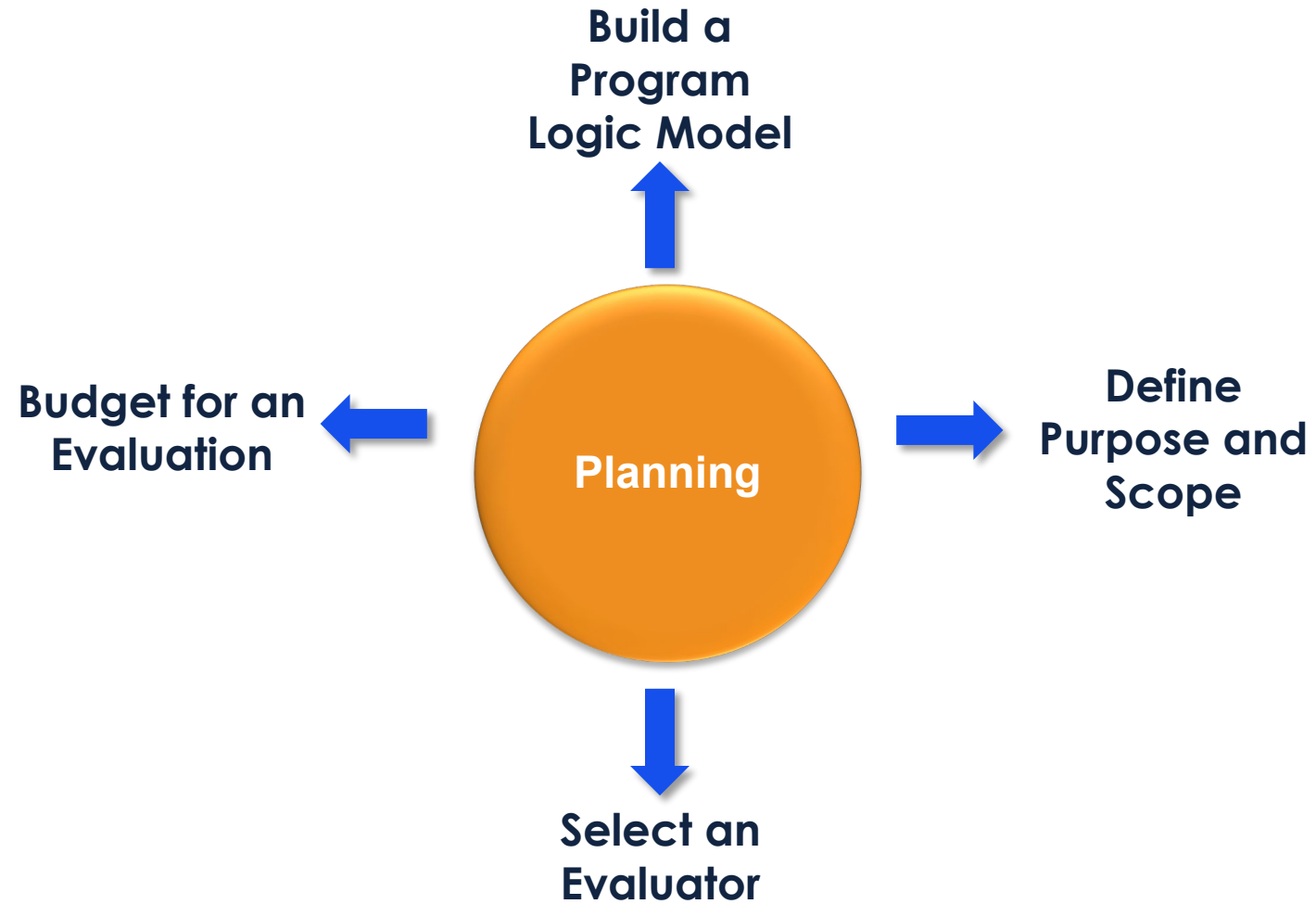


# Basic Steps for Conducting an Evaluation



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

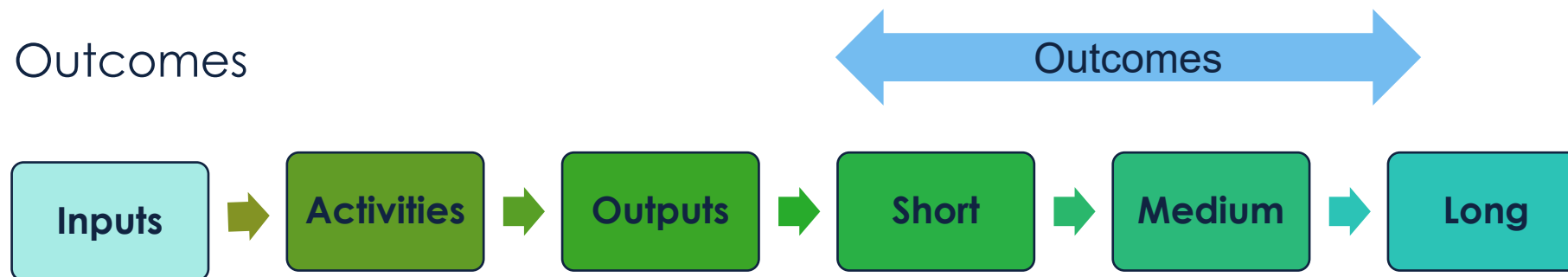
# Planning Phase Steps





# Step 1: Build a Program Logic Model

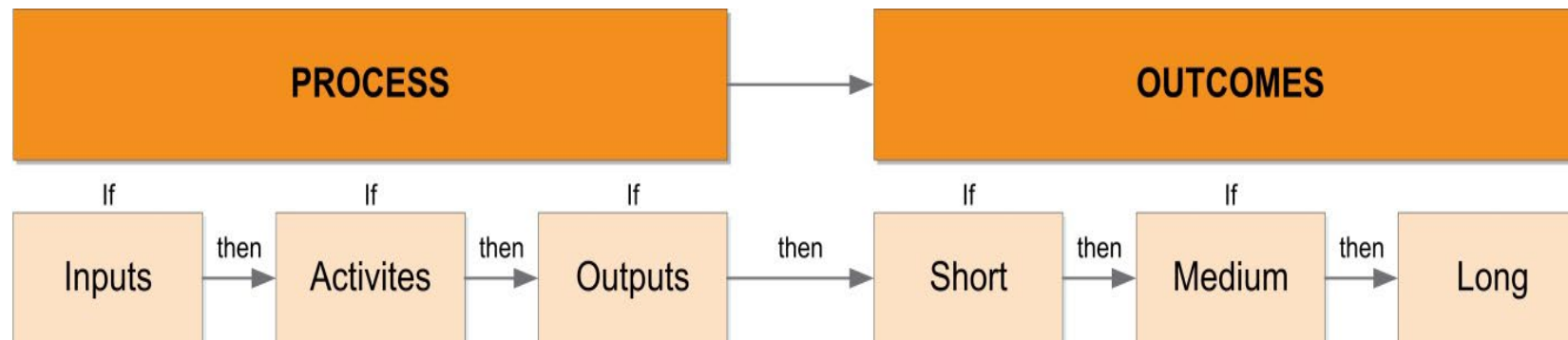
- A program logic model is a detailed visual representation of a program and its theory of change.
- Communicates how a program works by depicting the intended relationships among program components:
  - Inputs or resources
  - Activities
  - Outputs
  - Outcomes



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

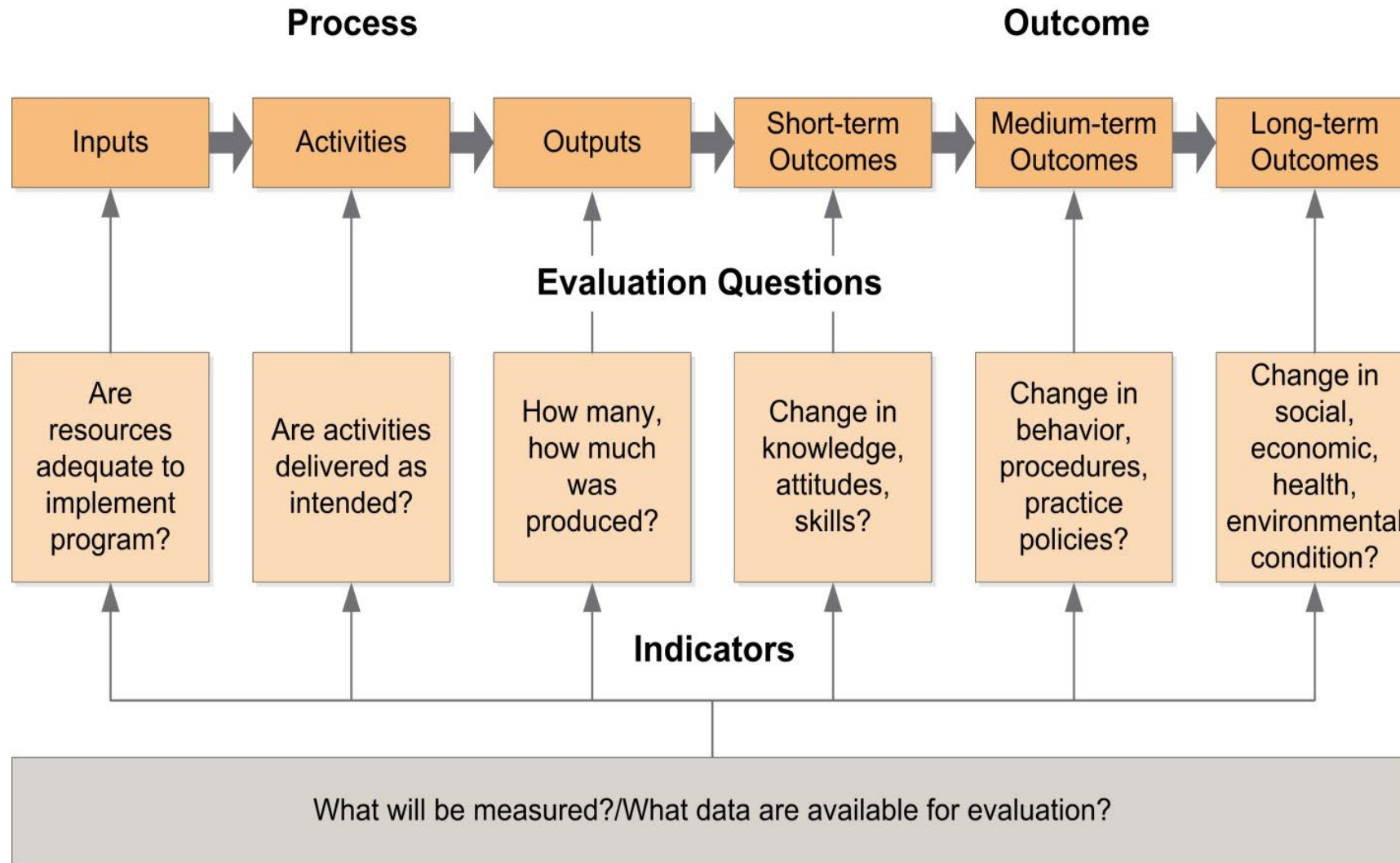
## Step 2: Define Purpose and Scope



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

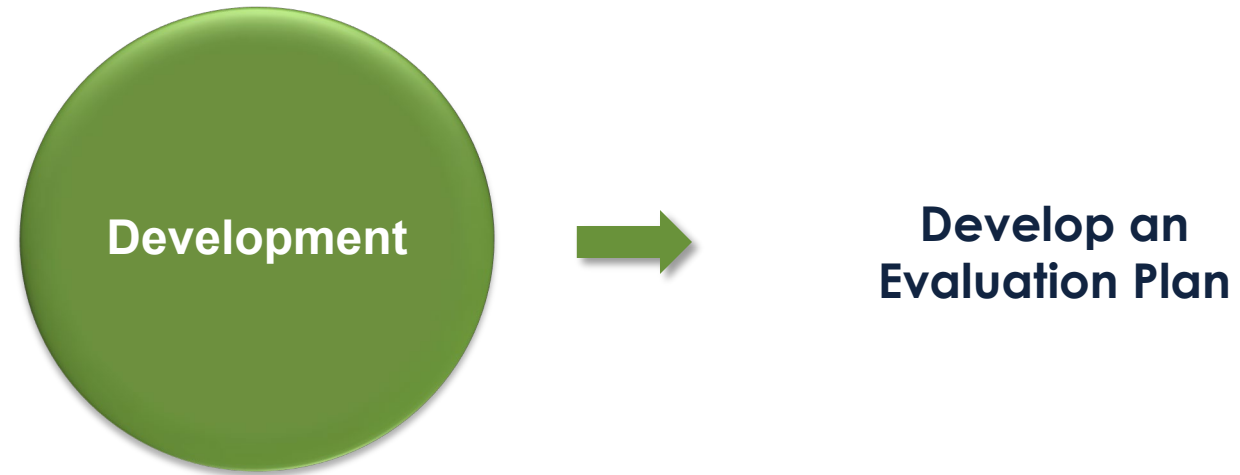


## Step 4: Select an Evaluator

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?

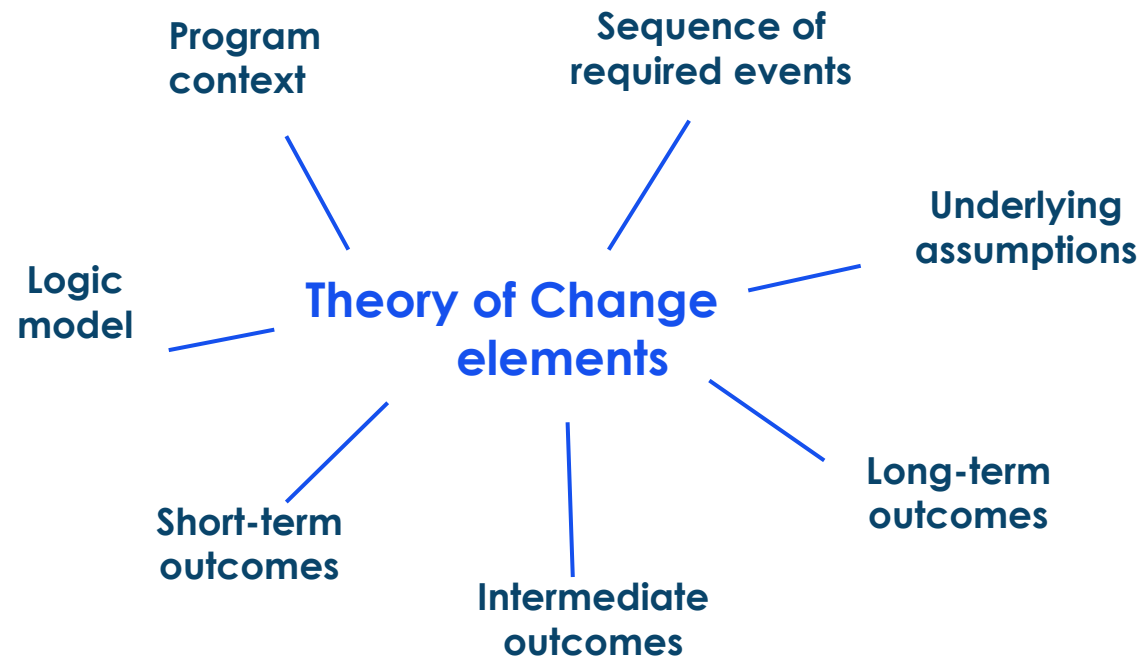
- I. Theory of change
- II. Scope of the evaluation
- III. Evaluation outcome(s) of interest
- IV. Research questions
- V. Evaluation design
- VI. Sampling methods
- VII. Data collection procedures, data sources, and measurement tools
- VIII. Analysis plan
- IX. Evaluator qualifications
- X. Timeline
- 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<br>- Large grantees can also request this if the national evaluation's design does not fulfill the requirements for a large grantee. |



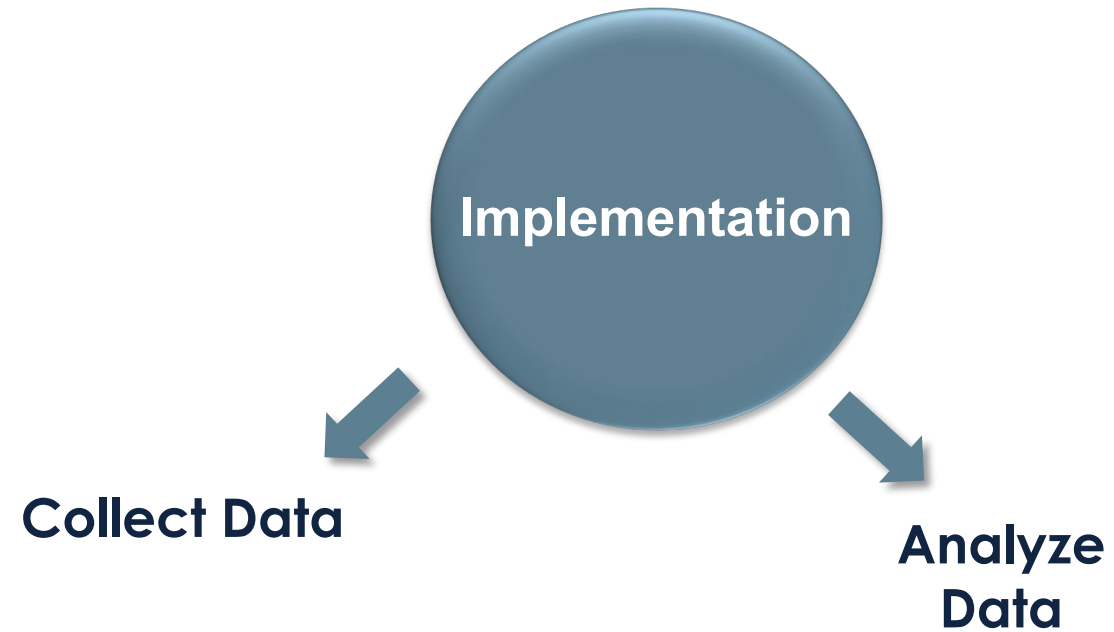
# Step 5: Develop an evaluation plan



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



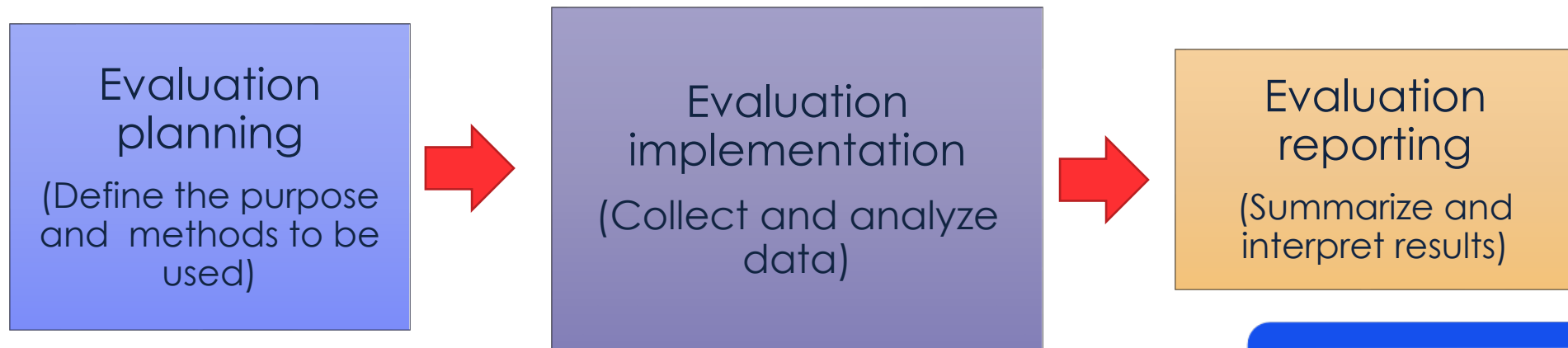
- AmeriCorps uses evaluation reports to:
  - Identify training and technical assistance needs for grantees
  - Identify and share promising practices and models for replication
  - Strengthen the evidence base for national service
- Grantees are encouraged to use their evaluation report to:
  - Create 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!

Carrie E. Markovitz, Ph.D.

NORC at the University of Chicago

[markovitz-carrie@norc.org](mailto:markovitz-carrie@norc.org)

To contact the Office of Research and  
Evaluation: [evaluation@americorps.gov](mailto:evaluation@americorps.gov)