

## Tip Sheet for Developing Evaluation Questions

Good evaluation planning begins with good evaluation questions. They can help to focus the evaluation, thus ensuring that it is manageable and feasible within budgetary and timeline constraints. They can help ensure that the needs of varied stakeholders are recognized and included. They also can give direction to an evaluation consultant and provide an outline for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Effective evaluation questions have the following characteristics:

- 1. Significant.** The questions should reflect things that matter and are important. They should strongly reflect the mission, goals, and targeted outcomes of your program.
- 2. Focused.** The questions should be relatively limited in number and scope. Select the most important questions, whose answers will provide essential data. Their language should be specific and reference project components and beneficiaries. When possible, phrase questions as open-ended, not just yes-or-no questions. Examples: "To what extent has the program attained...?" and "In what ways are students learning...?"
- 3. Assessable.** There should be efficient ways to collect data that will provide answers to the questions. Examples:
  - Assessable:** Did participation in the program result in more parental involvement?
  - Not Assessable:** Will students in the program be more successful in later years?

## Developing Evaluation Questions: Essential Steps

Developing evaluation questions can involve several approaches. The following are some recommended steps:

### Review the program's objectives.

Reviewing the program objectives should help you uncover several key questions related to the realization of those objectives. Often an outcome or objective can be turned into a question through minor revision of its syntax. Examples:

**Objective:** Teachers will reference standards in their teaching.

**Question:** To what extent have teachers referenced standards in their teaching?

### Develop questions that are relevant to the current stage of the program.

Different kinds of questions are needed for different stages of the program. Some examples:

Beginning of program

Whom should the program serve? What are their needs?

During program implementation

How effectively is the program being implemented?

At conclusion of program

What outcomes has the program met? To what extent?

### Get stakeholder input.

Review the initial list of questions with stakeholders, (i.e., persons who are involved in the program as staff, participants, beneficiaries, or consumers). Solicit input on the questions. Ask for additions or modifications.

### Build the question list into the evaluation matrix.

The evaluation matrix is a tool for keeping your evaluation on track. Build the question list into the evaluation matrix to link them to your objectives, indicators, and data sources and to ensure that they are revisited at key points in the program, especially when data are being collected and analyzed.

### Reexamine questions periodically.

Be prepared to reexamine the questions periodically during the program's implementation to ensure they are relevant and sufficient. Questions may need to change because you move from the planning stage through implementation; the program expands, targets new outcomes, or serves new populations; or the findings of the evaluation reveal new areas where you need more information.