

# Q3

## Is evaluation the right approach? If so, what kind?

### WHAT IT MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR USEFUL EVALUATION

The term evaluation gets used in a variety of ways in the nonprofit world and this can lead to confusion. Sometimes, evaluation can mean very simple satisfaction surveys or basic tracking of attendance. At other times, people may use the term to describe a very complex and long-term piece of applied research. Evaluations tend to lead to action when there is a good fit between approach and expectations and when everyone involved has the same understanding of this fit. There are even situations where evaluation (of any kind) may not be very useful at all. Evaluation tends to focus on how an intervention is working, what has been achieved, and why. If your questions are about other topics (e.g. is this intervention even needed at all? What are we going to do about the fact that we are not achieving outcomes?), then an evaluation may not be very helpful. The idea behind this question is to get people thinking about what they mean by evaluation and whether the evaluation approach they are considering really fits the situation at hand.

### HOW TO ASK IT

This question is a bit more technical than the last two. People who don't know a lot about evaluation (or the distinctions between evaluation, applied research, or performance measurement) may struggle to understand what is being asked here. A good starting point might be to ask for clarification on what each stakeholder means when talking about evaluation. As the person asking this question, the key thing is to try to keep the discussion focused on each group's hopes and goals for evaluation rather than the technical details.

EFFECTIVE EVALUATION MEASURES WHAT COUNTS



### Q3 IS EVALUATION THE RIGHT APPROACH?

**Here are some suggestions for other questions to ask should you need further probes to get to the information you are looking for:**

Are you more interested in investigating deep probing questions or checking to see if the program is on track?

What are you hoping this evaluation will tell you?

What do you mean or think of when you suggest we do evaluation?

Do we really need to do an evaluation?  
Should we consider, instead

How will you use the results of the evaluation?

Looking at research that has already been done?

Backing up a bit to better understand the needs of the community we serve?

Talking through our assumptions?

How does my organization stand to benefit from this evaluation? How do the people my organization serves stand to benefit?

Do you, as an evaluation stakeholder in this project/program, clearly understand our expectations around evaluation of this project or program? What concerns do you have about our expectations? Do you see any potential risks?



### **WHEN AND WHERE TO ASK IT**

This is a good question to ask when you feel your partner's expectations about your evaluation work may be vague or unrealistic.



**KEEP in MIND**

### **CHALLENGES THAT MIGHT COME UP** **CONFLICTING VIEWPOINTS**

This question can bring to the surface some particular viewpoints that may be in contradiction with yours, such as what is reasonable to achieve within the timeframe or whether you will have input into the evaluation design. While you may not be able to have as much progress on some of these questions as you would like, there may be an opportunity to probe a bit more and identify the reasons behind certain decisions, which over the long run may help to better understand each other's position.

The ONN blog entitled: Whaddaya mean, "evaluation?" — Mismatched expectations in nonprofit measurement may be useful when exploring this question. <http://theonnc.ca/whaddaya-mean-evaluation-mismatched-expectations-nonprofit-measurement/>