

Asking the Right Research Question

In seeking to improve the effectiveness of policies and programs, we need to tackle a wide range of questions...an impact evaluation can answer the basic question of whether a program or policy works. But it can also answer a host of other questions.

— Rachel Glennerster and Kudzai Takavarasha, *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*.

There are several critical questions to answer when considering conducting a randomized evaluation:

1. What is the precise research question we want to ask?
2. Can this question be answered through an impact evaluation—i.e. testing a specific causal relationship or hypothesis?
3. Does the researcher or implementer have the ability to randomize whether, where, when, or to whom the intervention happens?
4. Do we have a sufficiently large sample size to measure our outcomes with precision? (This may be determined by the research budget, or by the size, scope, and other details of the program being evaluated.)
5. Is the cost of the evaluation less than the expected value of the answer?

For a more detailed treatment of these questions, refer to the general guide to framing a research question. For teaching about selecting a research question, a PowerPoint presentation is available here.

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