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Develop your assessment questions

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**The International School
on Research Impact Assessment**

MELBOURNE | 19-23 SEPTEMBER 2016

Learning outcomes

- Describe the characteristics of good and not-so-good assessment questions
- Write a general assessment question(s) that align to the primary purpose of the assessment
- Write a specific assessment question(s) based on the general question that also align to your logic model



“The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong questions.”

Peter F. Drucker

Men, Ideas and Politics

Harvard Business School Press (2010)



Assessment questions

- Serve as a basis for essential discussions about **who** wants the answers and **why**
- Give structure to the assessment
- Facilitate appropriate and thoughtful planning



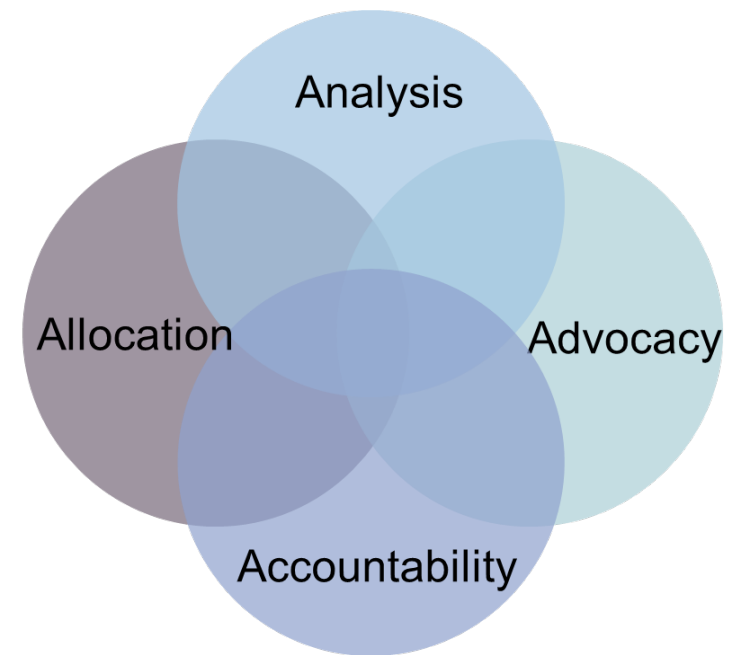
But ...

Developing questions of relevance and quality is not without its challenges

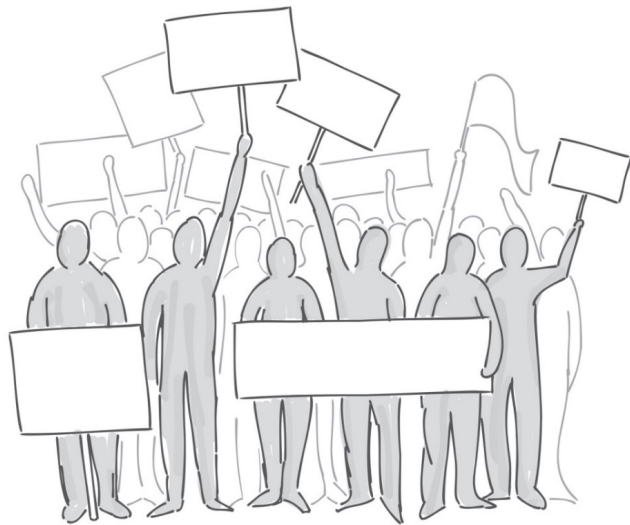


Process for developing questions

1. Clarify the program's objectives
2. Identify the purpose of the assessment
3. List and prioritise the general questions of interest to the assessment stakeholders



Different stakeholders may have different questions...



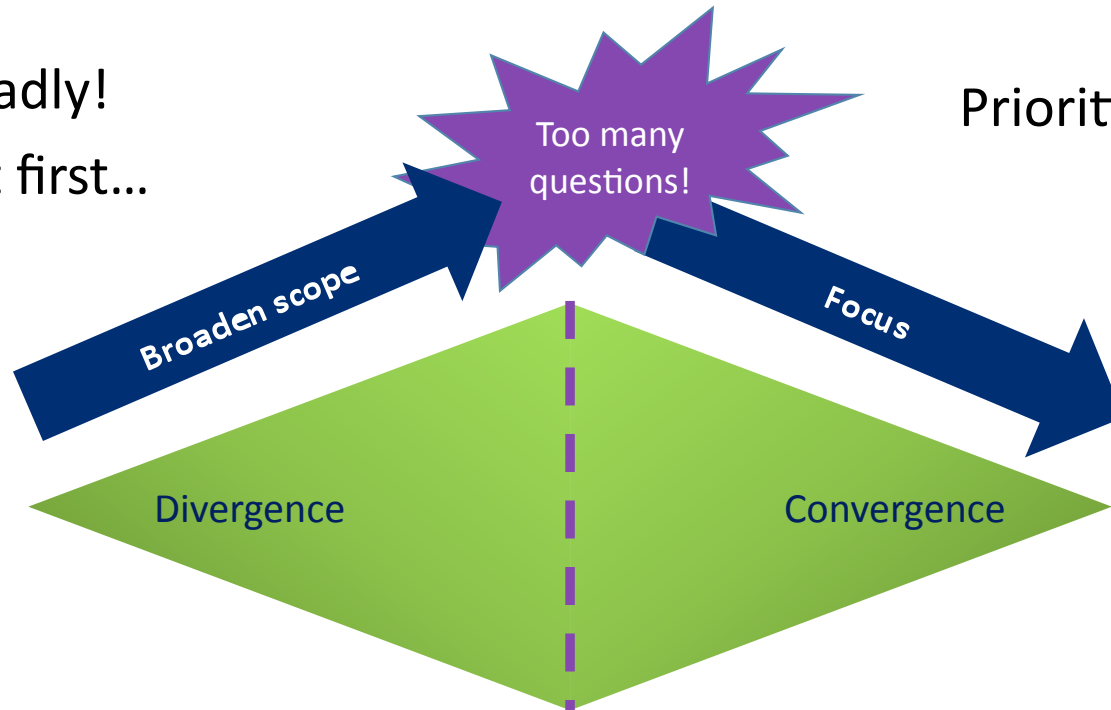
- Funders/donors
- Researchers
- Participants
- Users/decision-makers
- Beneficiaries
- Internal management



Process for developing questions

Think broadly!
At least at first...

Prioritise and rationalise



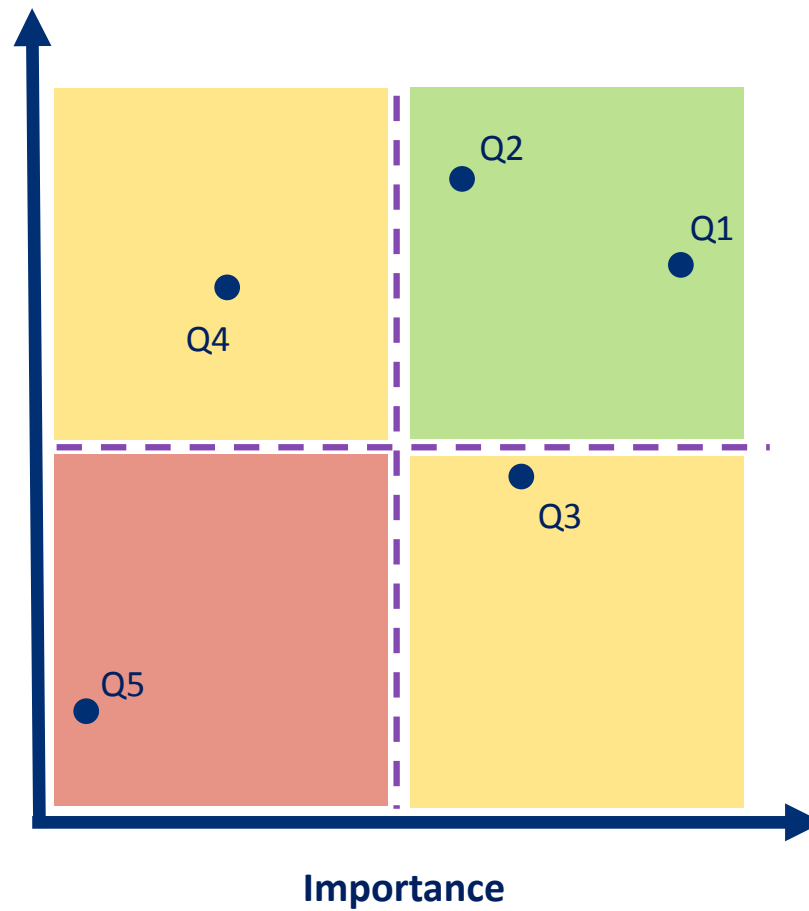
Process for developing questions

1. Clarify the program's objectives
2. Identify the purpose of the assessment
3. List and prioritise the general questions of interest to the assessment stakeholders
4. Determine what specific questions can be *realistically* addressed



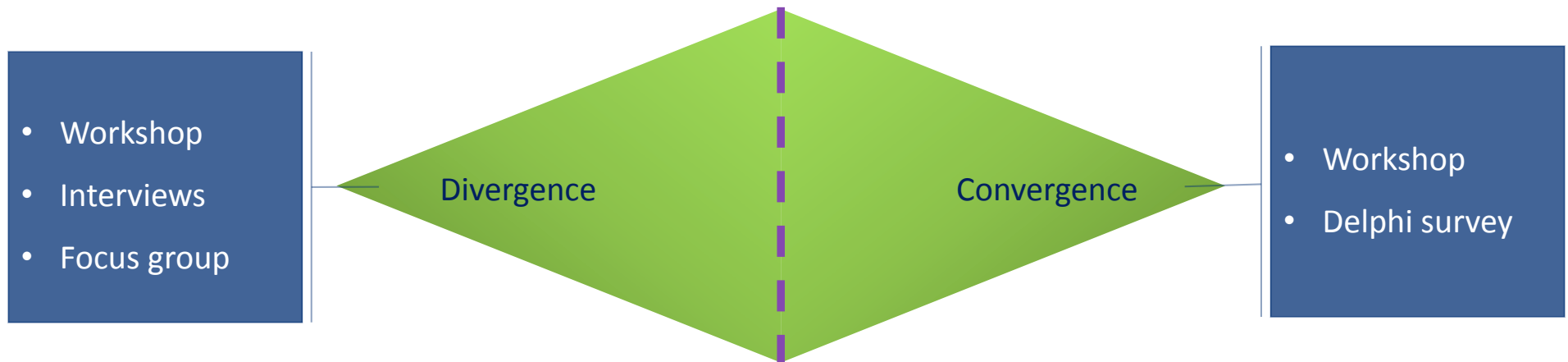
- Time
- Money
- Data availability
- Acceptability

Feasibility



Am I meant to do all this on my own...?

- No!
- Talking to people both develops questions and gets buy-in



'Good' questions



- Relevant to RIA **purpose**
- Of interest to **stakeholders**
- **Feasible** – both answerable and reasonable/appropriate
- **Measurable** - associated with some relevant criteria by which performance can be judged

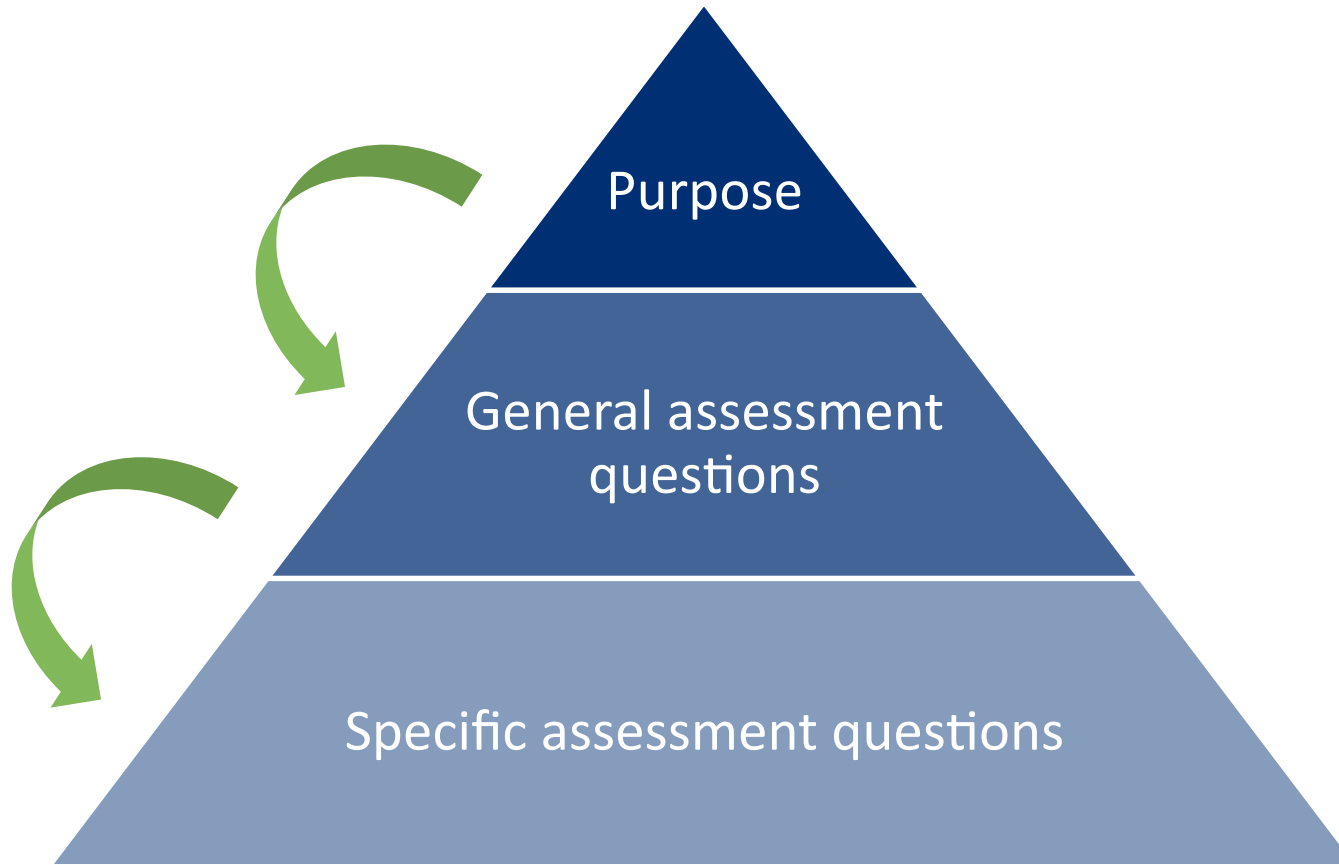


‘Not-so-good’ questions



- Unrelated to actual program activities
- Irrelevant to stakeholder needs
- Need more resources, time and expertise than is available
- Few observable indicators
- Ambiguous or vague terms – avoid needless jargon!





General vs specific assessment questions

General assessment questions...

Broad, overarching questions that **stakeholders** need answered for the **purpose** of the assessment

Factors to take into account:

- ✓ Why: purpose
- ✓ Who: stakeholders' perspectives
- ✓ The program areas that you need to focus on – make sure there are no major gaps
- ✓ Resources needed to answer the questions



General assessment questions

For example:

- Is the program producing the expected impacts?
- What factors helped or hindered the achievement of the impacts?
- To what extent can variation in program implementation explain differences in the impacts?
- Should the program be continued or ceased?



- ✓ Purpose
- ✓ Stakeholders
- ✓ Feasible
- ✓ Measurable



ACTIVITY TIME

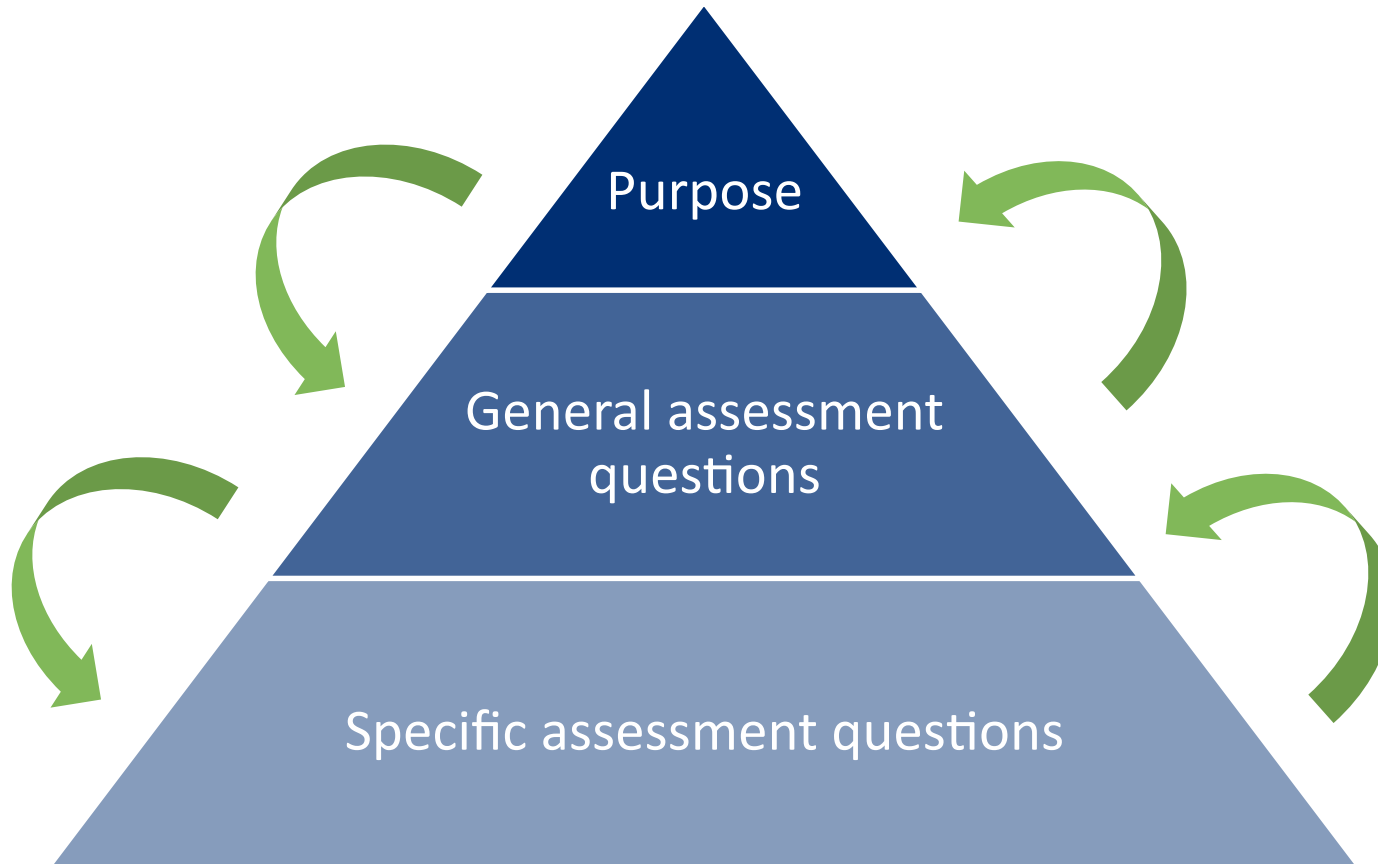
- Considering the **purpose** of your assessment, think about different general assessment questions you might ask.
- How do these differ by **stakeholder**? Think about what the most relevant question is for each stakeholder.



Specific assessment questions

- A set of specific questions can relate to each general question that:
 - Focus on the most important aspects of the general question
 - When combined, answer the general question
 - Inform indicator selection
- They can be developed from your impact pathway (or logic model) so that:
 - They cover the most important parts of the program for each general question
 - A coherent logic is built which fulfils the assessment's purpose





Specific assessment questions

General question	Examples of specific questions
Is the program producing the expected impacts?	What is the impact of the program on policy?
	Are some parts of the program having more impact than others?
	What are the barriers to producing impacts in area X?



Taking each of your general questions, develop specific questions under each.

Keep in mind...

- Purpose of the assessment
- Alignment to your impact pathway or logic model
- Available resources



Key Messages

- To identify the best questions, it's important to **think broadly** first
- Consider a range of **stakeholders**
- Using your impact pathways or logic model, working down from the overall **purpose**, can be a useful tool
- **Prioritisation** is often required and can help focus the assessment
- Don't rush the process!



Thank you

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