



SESSION 1: LEARNING QUESTION

STRATEGICALLY FOCUSING YOUR DATA EXPLORATION

What is a Learning Question?

A learning question is a question you have about your program, initiative, or community that you can answer through data. While the concept of a learning question overlaps with terms such as research or evaluation question, we lead with learning because the exploration of the data should be in the greater spirit of learning and action.

Where Do I Begin?

1. **Brainstorm!** Take the following steps to open your mind to possible learning questions:
 1. Grab a stack of sticky notes, or write directly on your Learning Question worksheet.
 2. Set a timer for 3-5 minutes. Consider the following prompts:
 - What have you always wanted to know about your program or community?
 - What do you want to know about your program's outcomes?
 - What do you want to know about what your program is doing? Should be doing? Or how well it is doing it?

What Makes a Strong Learning Question?

2. A strong learning question has certain qualities that make it more likely to be successfully answered with data and to be used for action.

Review each question, and check if your learning question is...

- Relevant:** Does your question align with your program goals? Is it timely given our current context?
- Useful:** Will your question help inform strategic decisions that will be used by stakeholders to make decisions or improvements? Are others asking for clarity on this question?
- Feasible:** Can you realistically answer this question with data you have available right now? Within the timeline or resources you have?
- Focused:** Is the question specific on the who, what, where?

How Do I Decide Which Question to Answer First?

3. Prioritize your list of questions. It can be easy to feel overwhelmed by the list you created, but keep in mind, these questions can all be answered in time.
 1. For each question, assign a rating on relevancy, usefulness, and feasibility.
 2. Reflect on whether any of these criteria should carry more weight than others.
 3. Select the learning question with the highest score.