

# Ten Things Evaluation Needs: An Evaluation Needs Assessment

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It is important to take stock, to do a rolling needs assessment, every year or so to guide the development of evaluation as a profession. What are the unknowns that continue to plague us? By identifying issues and problems in evaluation for which we have no good answers, we can direct our research energies in productive ways. Said another way, here are ten dissertation topics just waiting to be claimed.

I am a list maker. These questions are in no particular order. This is a list that has evolved over the past few years. I believe answers to these questions will help the field of evaluation to develop. No answers and the field grows stagnate. After presenting my list of ten to an evaluation seminar at WMU I invited my colleagues to add to this list. Questions 11-21 reflect their contributions.

1. Why do some institutions value evaluation and many others do not? What implications would this knowledge have for mainstreaming evaluation?
2. When evaluators claim to use a particular evaluation model (e.g., empowerment evaluation), how can their fidelity to the underlying principles of the model be verified? To what extent ARE models followed?
3. To what extent do evaluations include metaevaluation? What standards are used when metaevaluation is included? Are these standards justified?
4. Is knowledge from completed evaluations being accumulated? How is this done and how is it made accessible to potential users?
5. To what extent does evaluation impact public policy? How can its impact be improved?
6. To what extent is knowledge of evaluation theory and practice communicated across disciplines, professions, institutions, geopolitical boundaries, cultures? What factors affect communication patterns?
7. To what extent are long term outcomes (such as in HIV programs) being evaluated? What factors impede long term evaluations, and how can long term evaluation be improved?
8. Where are the academic centers that are preparing high quality evaluators (those who know experimental design, data analysis, cost analysis, needs assessment, metaevaluation, case study methods, instrument development-validation-procedural use,

evaluation models and their appropriate use, project management, evaluation ethics, politics of evaluation, how to market evaluation, ...)?

9. Who is going to move into the space left when the pioneers of evaluation retire and take on a lower profile? Who will motivate and prepare the third and fourth generations of evaluation leaders?
10. It would be presumptuous to claim insight into all that we don't know about evaluation. This is where you get to contribute. What burning questions are missing from this list?

At this point my colleagues added the following questions. If nothing else the total list sets an agenda for R&D in evaluation for many years to come. Hopefully we will be able to cross off a few unknowns in the near future, and, of course add some new burning questions.

11. Where in other disciplines are there answers to these questions?
12. What does it mean to be an evaluation model/approach? What are the divisions?
13. How do practitioners use evaluation models? Why do they select one and not others?
14. Why aren't Joint Committee or GAO Standards used in most evaluations?
15. To what extent is evaluation perceived as a form of disciplined inquiry?
16. To what extent are evaluation concepts miscommunicated or lost in translation across countries? Do we understand each other across countries?
17. To what extent does evaluation add value?
18. To what extent do new professionals in evaluation know the evaluation literature?
19. Why isn't evaluation pushing politicians?
20. To what extent do evaluators report evaluative conclusions?
21. To what extent are evaluations done by unqualified people, and what effect does this have on the field?