



Group Exercise: Designing an Experimental Evaluation

Step 1. As a group brainstorm a list of potential evaluation questions. Try to identify questions that face your agency/organization where having additional evidence would help improve the practices and performance of your organization and/or its programs.

Step 2. From your list of potential evaluation questions, identify at least two causal questions to work through the following ten questions of this exercise. The goals of this exercise are to practice (i) being precise about defining the effect you want to measure, and (ii) thinking about how you might create variation in the interventions. You do not need to capture all of the realities of the field conditions. If a detail about field conditions is uncertain (e.g., how exactly to measure the outcome), just make assumptions and guesses that capture the essence of the context and move on. For each potential evaluation question, answer the following ten questions with your group:

1. **What is the evaluation question? Why is this question important?** Be as precise as you can.
2. **What are the interventions (the “treatments”)?** Examples: changes in messaging, alternative incentives, changes in the defaults.
3. **What is the alternative (control) condition to which you want to compare the intervention?** It could be “no intervention” or it could be an alternative intervention.
4. **What are they key outcomes?** Examples: participation in EQIP, establishment of riparian buffers, or households’ engagement in fire mitigation actions.
5. **What is the smallest level at hope to observe the outcomes?** Examples: farmers, farms, watersheds, counties, employees, or local USDA offices.
6. **What is your target population?** Examples: farmers in the Great Lakes region, farms that currently are not enrolled in USDA conservation programs.
7. **At what level will you randomize the interventions?** Your answer may or may not be your answer to Q5. For example, you could randomize the intervention at the county level, but measure outcomes at the farm level.
8. **What is the expected number of units that you can expose to the intervention (sample size)? What is the expected number of control units?** Feel free to guess.
9. **What are the potential biases that may arise?** Examples: treatment or control group outcomes differ because of the sample selection rather than the treatment; spillovers from treatment to control; attrition during the study)
10. **What help, if any, would you need to conduct this experiment?**