

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) to guide Footprint Evaluations

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Introduction

This list of key evaluation questions (KEQs) is one of several outputs of the Footprint Evaluation project. Its primary purpose is to show one potentially useful way in which sustainability might be embedded into an evaluation – by infusing it into each relevant evaluation question rather than tacking it on as a standalone question.

The list is grounded in a conceptualization of evaluation as being fundamentally about asking and answering *evaluative* questions, i.e., questions that ask the evaluation team to not just *describe* the evaluand and its results in value-neutral terms, but to systematically determine *how good, valuable, worthwhile, and important* these things were (i.e., to draw *explicitly evaluative conclusions*). [They have been developed from earlier versions in Jane Davidson’s evaluation workshops and publications.]

Identifying the relevant values and unpacking the evaluative terms in each of the KEQs is a core part of the job of answering them. This is no simple or formulaic task; these discussions are an extremely important part of any evaluation. Although we will define a few key terms in a glossary to be included with this set of KEQs, evaluative terms will not be defined in detail. Rather, this important task is intended to be led by those conducting the evaluation.

This list of KEQs has been designed so that it can apply in any sector, type of evaluand, level of analysis, etc. As such, the list is deliberately generic; each evaluation team should rewrite/interpret the questions for the particular sector, context, culture, population/community, evaluand, and evaluation audience, using wording that makes sense for that application.

These KEQs may also be used in conjunction with – or as a way of applying – national or organizational evaluation criteria such as the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria.

Who might use these KEQs, and for what?

- The most straightforward application is that they may be adapted as a high-level framework to guide an entire evaluation, clarifying what the evaluation is trying to find out. A particular evaluation may include versions of all or a subset of the KEQs.
- Similarly, the KEQs could be adapted to form part of a ToR or SoW when commissioning an evaluation.
- We anticipate that some professionals may also find these KEQs useful to inform sustainability-ready design, quality assurance, or adaptive management.

A strong set of sustainability-ready KEQs will be challenging for many evaluation teams to answer well. Part of Footprint’s effort is to help create tools, resources, and learning opportunities that will build capacity for evaluators to answer questions like this.

KEQ SUCCINCT VERSION	KEQ SUB-QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>KEQ 1: Relevance & Coherence</p> <p>How relevant is the evaluand to the population/sector <u>and</u> the natural environment – and how well does it complement other efforts in the context?</p>	<p>How well does the evaluand address the current and trending conditions in the human <u>and</u> natural environment?</p> <p>How well does it complement other initiatives or change efforts that affect this population/sector and the natural environment?</p> <p>Given any changes in the setting, is this still the most important thing we could be doing here right now?</p>
<p>KEQ 2: Design & Adaptation</p> <p>How well does the design address the strengths, needs, and aspirations of both human <u>and</u> natural systems — in ways that enable both to thrive?</p>	<p>How well does the program take into account the different spatial and temporal scales salient to the relevant human and natural systems?</p> <p>How well does the design plausibly address not just symptoms but root causes and systemic drivers of problems and inequitable and catastrophic outcomes?</p> <p>How effectively did consultation ensure that the needs and concerns of affected people and environments were understood and taken into consideration before finalizing design and proceeding with rollout, and to respond to emerging concerns along the way?</p> <p>How realistic are the approach and design, given the budget, timeline, capacities, and political and social capital?</p> <p>How well has the design been adapted and improved over time to respond to emerging conditions and learning and to achieve the needed human and natural system outcomes?</p>
<p>KEQ 3: Implementation</p> <p>How well has the evaluand been implemented?</p>	<p>How well has the evaluand prioritized and managed the delivery of support so that the right people and natural system elements receive what is most needed at the right times and places and in the right ways?</p> <p>How appropriate is the balance between implementation fidelity and</p>

KEQ SUCCINCT VERSION	KEQ SUB-QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
	<p>responsive adaptation/tailoring to context, culture, population, landscapes, changing priorities, differentiated needs and aspirations, etc.?</p> <p>How well does implementation serve to uphold and enhance the rights, dignity, and self-determination of the relevant populations, including their responsibilities for the stewardship of natural systems?</p>
<p>KEQ 4: Outcomes & Impacts</p> <p>How good, valuable, and important are the outcomes and impacts?</p>	<p>Outcomes and impacts include changes contributed to or prevented by the evaluand across their relevant temporal scales – and their shelf life (sustainment).</p> <p>This includes effects on the human system as well as the natural environment – all affected subgroups, communities, organizations, society, the economy, and the natural systems within which they exist – both intended and unintended, for both the target population/environment and anyone or anything else substantially impacted.</p> <p>How substantially did the evaluand contribute to (or adversely impact) the most important strengths, needs, and aspirations of both human and natural systems – particularly of the most critical and/or threatened parts of the natural system and those who had been most marginalized, oppressed, and/or least well served in the human system?</p> <p>How appropriately does the evaluand value, privilege, protect, or exploit different parts of the relevant human and natural systems (e.g., different groups of people, different parts of the ecosystem)?</p> <p>How well did the evaluand contribute to or achieve the needed <i>systemic and structural</i> changes, including processes and capacities, so that root causes are addressed (not just symptoms) and results sustained?</p>

KEQ SUCCINCT VERSION	KEQ SUB-QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS
<p>KEQ 5: Patterns, Outliers, and Links</p> <p>Where, when, for whom, under what conditions, and why did the evaluand deliver the most and least valuable outcomes for coupled human and natural systems?</p>	<p>What can we learn from the pockets of strong and weak performance, particularly any that were surprising?</p> <p>Were different causal mechanisms in play within and across systems, for and among different groups of people and parts of the environment, and under different conditions? What was it that made the relevant causal mechanisms fire so effectively or ineffectively?</p> <p>What patterns were evident, particularly those that might help us understand the nature of complex, emergent change such as effect-reinforcing and effect-limiting causal loops, fractals, and tipping points?</p> <p>How do different temporal and spatial scales affect the patterns?</p>
<p>KEQ 6: Durability</p> <p>How environmentally, systemically, politically, and financially durable are the changes the evaluand has contributed to?</p>	<p>How well has the evaluand helped ensure that what it has left behind protects and ideally regenerates social and natural systems?</p> <p>How adequate are the capabilities, capacities, systems, and structures needed to address, build on, and compel the needed change?</p> <p>How well does ongoing access to resources allow for the continuation of the needed change?</p>
<p>KEQ 7: Overall Value</p> <p>How good, valuable, or worthwhile is the evaluand overall, given its relevance and coherence, design and implementation, the value of outcomes and impacts, their durability, and what it cost to achieve them?</p>	<p>This question is the synthesis step, which takes into account all of KEQs 1 to 6, plus costs to both systems.</p>

Glossary	Other key concepts
Coherence	Subjectivity and objectivity
Coupled human and natural systems	Value judgments
Do no harm / circular economy	Temporal scales – Footprint takes the position that the default
Durability	temporal scale is 7 human generations (back 3, forward 3, plus
Evaluand	current interests involved in the intervention) – looking at how
Human systems – people, groups, communities, organizations,	things used to be and looking forward to a world for our
society, economies, cultures, etc.	grandchildren’s children.
Natural and engineered solutions	Spatial scales
Natural systems – all non-human living and naturally occurring non-	Units of account – who is involved, who counts.
living things	Unit of analysis – program/project/initiative, cluster of initiatives, the
Natural system categories, e.g., ecosystems, landscapes, species, ...	system.
Nexus	Level of analysis – policy or multi-level governance, a territory or
Relevance	community, a specific bounded program.
Restoration / regeneration	
Sustainability	

These items are still to come – comments welcome about what else should be included.