Getting to Measures Worksheet

Explained and Illustrated

This document follows the steps in the "Getting to Measures Blank Worksheet", using an example with explanations. A diagram at the end illustrates the thinking process. This worksheet is an exercise in fine-tuning, exploring alternatives, and considering less familiar options before making a plan. The effort is valuable for finding the best measurement strategy for what you want to know.

1. **Draft Evaluation Question:**
Be precise about what you want to know about your program. Write this inquiry out as a formal Evaluation Question.

The standard form for Evaluation Questions organizes the inquiry around specific elements of the program model, identifying the activity and/or outcome of interest. It also indicates clearly what strength of causality, if any, you are seeking to assess. The process of exploring options and developing a measurement strategy inevitably leads to some re-thinking of the Evaluation Question, so plan on revisiting this as you iterate through the steps.

2. **Clarify the "constructs" in your Evaluation Question** above – what exactly do you mean by the activity and/or outcome you are focusing on?

For example, suppose an outcome in the Evaluation Question refers to "enjoyment of cooking". Does this mean enjoying the process of cooking? Or enjoying producing a complete meal? Or enjoying preparing dishes from scratch? Does "cooking" exclude heating up prepared frozen foods to produce a complete meal? What about salads and things that don't involve a stove? Are you interested in enjoyment just during the class sessions, or beyond class? Or do you really only care about enjoyment of cooking because your program is designed on the premise that those who enjoy cooking are more likely to buy fresh and potentially locally-grown foods? (In this case the outcome might be better stated as "enjoying using fresh locally grown ingredients")…What, precisely, do you mean by this idea of enjoyment of cooking? What is your definition of this "construct"?

It can be helpful to get more than just one person's view of the meaning of the construct. Even among the program staff there might be different views of what is really of interest, and the views of stakeholders might be even more different. (Since stakeholders might well be the ones to whom the evaluation results will be reported, specifying a definition that would be appropriate to them and consistent with what they are thinking might be very important – and it can be surprising how much people's views about a shared item can actually differ!)

Another useful step for clarifying the intentions or definitions is to consult other resources – for example, if it's a classic 4-H construct (like one of the Essential Elements), look it up in published 4-H resources, find out how it has been handled in the research literature, etc. This is useful not only for clarifying the construct, but also for possibly aligning your evaluation with others that have been done before. That is, if a research-based definition "fits" what you are looking for, and if there turn out to be evaluation tools connected to that line of research, then you will have a great lead on a potential measure.

Note: once this thinking has been done, revisit the Evaluation Question above and see if it needs to be revised to capture this more precise specification of the construct you want to measure.

3. **Using this sharper definition of the constructs, work through the following:**

The following are small sub-steps in an overall question of "How could you know?" The breakdown into small steps might seem unnecessarily incremental, basically an exercise in splitting hairs, but it can help ensure that evaluation planners come up with a full range of options for answering the Evaluation Question. As the example demonstrates, there are multiple options for each of the possibilities that emerge, forming a tree that branches repeatedly (see diagram at end). If you don't keep the options alive at each step, you might miss some.

It is <u>not</u> essential that you fill (a), (b) and (c) out in this order, but it is useful to cover all of them in some order or other. Often people's thinking takes them right to types of evidence (item (b)) for example, but if that's where your mind goes then fill in (b) but don't forget to also do (a) and (c) and in both sections try to come up with multiple examples. The point of splitting this overall "How could you know" question into pieces is to tease out a wider range of options to consider so that you can choose the best one.

(a) **What might this "look like" or consist of in practice?** (List as many options as you can. Be creative – think outside the "usual" options.)

The construct identified above is an abstract statement of what you are looking for. The next step is to "operationalize" this – identify what it would mean in the real world, or in practice. What are the "pictures in your head" that come to mind when you think about a person or group doing this Activity, or having this Outcome? If you know it when you see it, what would you be seeing? Brainstorm how you (or others) might recognize something when you (they) see it. As before, it is useful to get multiple contributions to this brainstorming. Ask people to think about how they'd know it if they saw it, and then what it is that would have persuaded them.

For example, if the construct is defined more precisely as" enjoying producing meals from scratch", it might show up as someone taking time in the grocery store to choose fresh produce, having more meals at home and fewer at a restaurant, spending less money on pre-prepared foods, giving more invitations to friends to come over for dinner, smiling more while cooking, choosing to cook when they don't "have to", talking to friends more often about meals prepared at home, trying new recipes, expanding their collection of spices, etc. (See even more options in the diagram at the end of this document.)

(b) **What might serve as evidence?** For the most promising candidates in (a), write down various kinds of evidence that would be informative about whether this has occurred.

In the above example, evidence might include the proportion of someone's grocery bill that included raw ingredients, the contents of their trash (vegetable peels vs empty prepared food containers!), the number of recipes that they actually use in a given month, the amount of time they spend on food preparation in the kitchen, the number of dinner invitations they issue, what they say about how they feel about cooking, etc.

(c) **Review the strengths and weaknesses of the options,** taking into account several aspects that matter: "closeness" to the real thing; accuracy and reliability. Write down a short list of the most promising candidates from (b).

Personal statements from people about how they feel about cooking is close to the "source", so to speak. However there might be some bias in what they say depending on who they are saying it to. So it might be best to combine their personal statements with some outside observational evidence like the proportion of their grocery bill that goes to raw ingredients rather than pre-prepared foods (you'd need some basis for deciding what constituted "more"— that is, does it change compared to pre-program levels, or does it differ from what a comparable person who doesn't like cooking might spend.)

4. **How could you gather this evidence?** Again, think of as many options as you can and list them here. (Possibilities might include video-taping a demonstration, live observation during class sessions, directly asking participants, asking people who know the participants, testing the end-products, etc.) Identify the ways that seem best, taking into account accuracy, feasibility, fit with program context and target population. Indicate the top choices among those on your list.

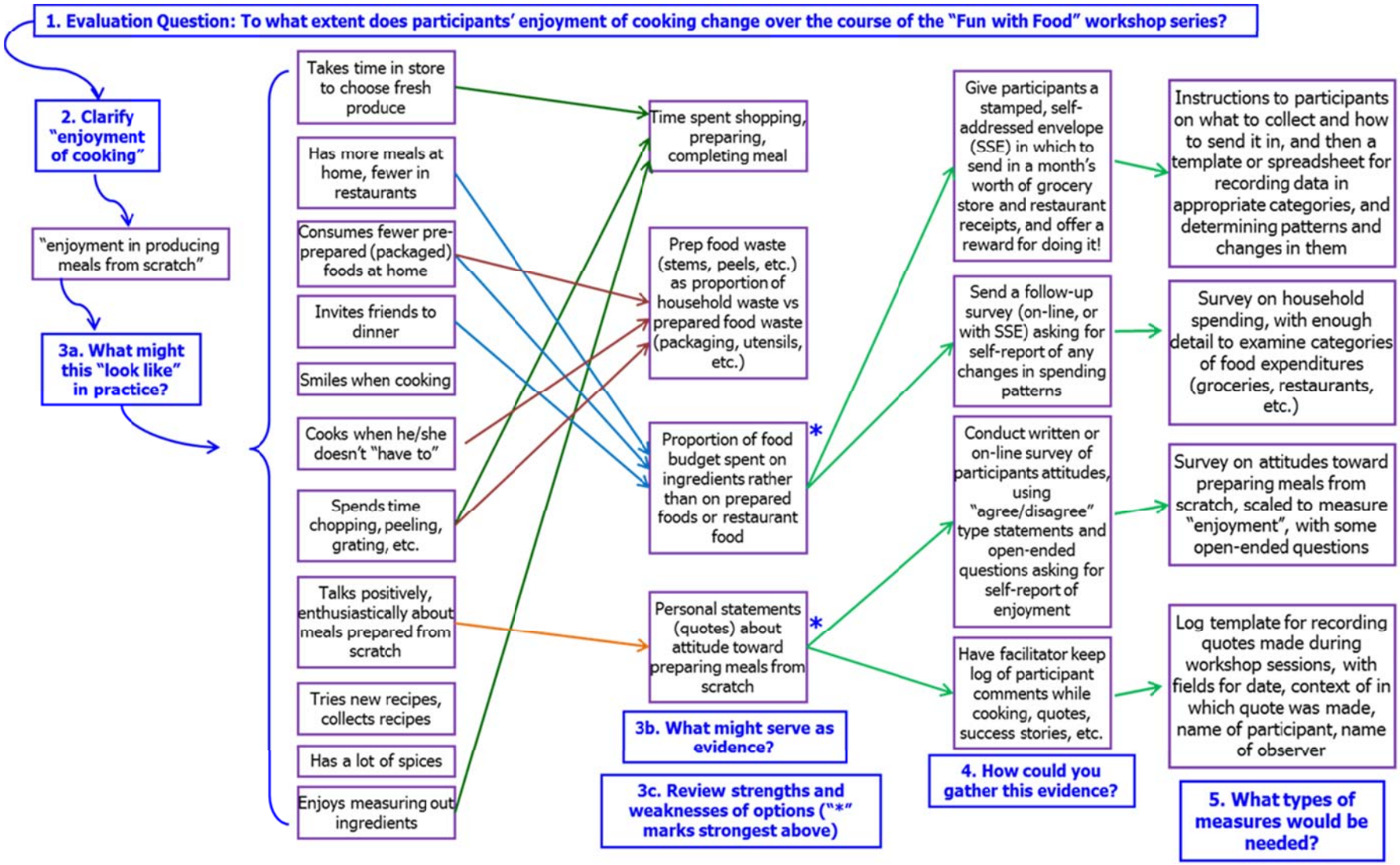
For example, to get personal statements about how they feel about cooking you might gather it by interviewing them directly, or by interviewing their housemates to get quotes or recollections, or by asking participants to fill out a survey about attitudes toward cooking, or by keeping a log of participant comments overheard by the cooking instructors or stories the teachers noted at the end of each class. Observers might be able to capture indicators of an attitude like enjoyment of cooking through a carefully developed observational checklist.

If this is a large class, direct interviews might be too time-consuming. Identifying and contacting housemates is likely to be very time-consuming and since it provides second-hand information it is likely to be weak. A written survey might be feasible, but if class time is short it might not fit in well. Having instructors capture quotes at the end of each class might be a quick way of capturing basic indications of attitudes. It would not burden participants, and if your stakeholders are receptive to quotes this might be a good choice. Similarly, an observational checklist, if of sufficient quality, would be relatively unobtrusive, could be completed by a trained volunteer observer or by the facilitator, and would mean that data would be available right at the end of class time. See the diagram for additional ideas.

Once again, revisit your Evaluation Question phrasing in 1(b) and see if it needs updating. When finalized, it becomes a central component of the written Evaluation Plan.

5. **What measures would be needed?** For your answer(s) to 4, what type(s) of measure would allow you to gather evidence in a way that would support analysis? Here is a list of possible measure types from which to choose: case study, interview, observation, group assessment (e.g. focus group), expert or peer review, portfolio review, testimonial, test of knowledge or skill, photograph, slide or video, diary or journal, log, document analysis, action cards, simulation, problem story, creative expression, unobtrusive measures.

For the above, one measure would be a Quote Log with appropriate fields for recording all the data needed (date, class, comment made, etc.) Another measure would be the observational checklist of in-class "enjoying cooking" behaviors to look for. To conduct interviews, you would need an interview guide with a carefully selected list of questions in the order you want to ask them. You might also ask students to fill out a brief survey near the end of the program. Additional examples are in the last segment of the diagram.


1. Evaluation Question: To what extent does participants' enjoyment of cooking change over the course of the "Fun with Food" workshop series?
2. Clarify "enjoyment of cooking"
"enjoyment in producing meals from scratch"
3a. What might this "look like" in practice?
Takes time in store to choose fresh produce
Has more meals at home, fewer in restaurants
Consumes fewer pre-prepared (packaged) foods at home
Invites friends to dinner
Smiles when cooking
Cooks when he/she doesn't "have to"
Spends time chopping, peeling, grating, etc.
Talks positively, enthusiastically about meals prepared from scratch
Tries new recipes, collects recipes
Has a lot of spices
Enjoys measuring out ingredients
Time spent shopping, preparing, completing meal
Prep food waste (stems, peels, etc.) as proportion of household waste vs prepared food waste (packaging, utensils, etc.)
Proportion of food budget spent on ingredients rather than on prepared foods or restaurant food
*
Personal statements (quotes) about attitude toward preparing meals from scratch
*
3b. What might serve as evidence?
3c. Review strengths and weaknesses of options ("*" marks strongest above)
Give participants a stamped, self-addressed envelope (SSE) in which to send in a month's worth of grocery store and restaurant receipts, and offer a reward for doing it!
Send a follow-up survey (on-line, or with SSE) asking for self-report of any changes in spending patterns
Conduct written or on-line survey of participants attitudes, using "agree/disagree" type statements and open-ended questions asking for self-report of enjoyment
Have facilitator keep log of participant comments while cooking, quotes, success stories, etc.
4. How could you gather this evidence?
Instructions to participants on what to collect and how to send it in, and then a template or spreadsheet for recording data in appropriate categories, and determining patterns and changes in them
Survey on household spending, with enough detail to examine categories of food expenditures (groceries, restaurants, etc.)
Survey on attitudes toward preparing meals from scratch, scaled to measure "enjoyment", with some open-ended questions
Log template for recording quotes made during workshop sessions, with fields for date, context of in which quote was made, name of participant, name of observer
5. What types of measures would be needed?