

# 8 EVALUATION AND LEARNING

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## 8.1 Approaching Evaluation with a Learning Mindset

Evaluation and learning are integral to audience-focused communication. These processes provide insights for better decision-making, and ultimately enable you to be more efficient and effective in your work.

Rather than treating evaluation as something that happens after the outreach, think of it as an ongoing feedback mechanism that lets you check your assumptions about landowners' preferences ([see Section 4.5: How to Develop an Audience Profile](#)) and gives you information about what's working well and what isn't. When you incorporate this intelligence into your outreach efforts, you will be more successful. Of course, evaluation is also essential for establishing when you meet project goals and milestones, and enables you to communicate the value and impact of your work.

### ESTABLISHING LEARNING QUESTIONS

Incorporating evaluation into your work is often more a matter of mindset than money or time. To successfully integrate evaluation into your project, it helps to clearly define what you want to know and what you will do with that information.

Start by asking: What do we need to know to be more effective, efficient or impactful?

This line of thought might yield specific learning questions, such as:

- Are “town hall” style meetings the right way to get our message to landowners? Would smaller meetings at a coffee shop work better?
- Should we continue to invest in radio ads?
- Is our message working just for the target audience segment or does it have broader appeal?
- Did we anticipate and address the main barriers to action?
- Are we achieving the desired landscape changes?

If you're working in collaboration with other organizations, make sure that your project team discusses these questions and agrees on them, because they are important in shaping your evaluation effort. They will guide your data collection ([see Section 8.2: Selecting Metrics and Collecting Data](#)) and determine how the data is analyzed, reported and used ([see Section 8.3: Harvesting Learnings and Adapting Your Work](#)). They may even influence how you conduct your outreach. For example, if you want to compare different motivators, you could gain some insight from sending one mailer with a hunting focus and another with a money-saving focus, to see which one garners more responses.

Because your time and budget are limited, consider what information will influence your work the most. Perhaps you're pretty sure about the channels you will use but are less sure about what drives landowner actions. In that case, you can put minimal effort into tracking and checking your channels, and more time and money into understanding why landowners did or didn't respond to your materials. In addition to helping you focus your limited resources, establishing your learning questions can help the whole evaluation process feel less overwhelming.

Identifying learning questions will help you keep your evaluation work manageable and ensure the results are useful. Spend some time early on thinking about what information will help you do better in the future.