- Who are the clients or customers of the evaluand and what stake might they have in the outcomes of the evaluation?
- Who has a "right to know" the evaluation's results?

The answers they give to the above questions help evaluators make decisions about how inclusive and diverse the stakeholder group should be.

Remember that those you identify as stakeholders will not necessarily be the people from whom you will be collecting data. Although you may contact some of these individuals during the data collection phase, it is important not to equate stakeholders with data sources. This step in the evaluation planning ensures that all potential users of the evaluation findings are identified so that maximum use of the evaluation's findings can be made—both from a program improvement standpoint as well as for the purpose of marketing and education. Figures 5.1-5.3 provide examples of stakeholders and their potential uses of the evaluation findings.

Developing Key Evaluation Questions

A major outcome of the focusing phase is a list of broad, guiding questions the evaluation will seek to address. They form the boundary and scope of the evaluation and serve to communicate to others what the evaluation will and won't attend to. The questions that are developed are the result of the input and negotiations among the evaluator and stakeholders. As a group is guided through the process of developing these key questions, anywhere from ten to fifty questions may be generated. Given that answering so many questions is often not feasible because of various time and resource constraints, we recommend that the group:

- Examine the questions to make sure that they are truly overarching, general questions and are not so specific that they might be considered survey or interview questions
- If possible, and where appropriate, change yes/no types of questions to open-ended types of questions
- Group the questions by themes or categories

- Prioritize the questions in each category according to those that are "need to answer now" versus "would be nice to answer" (It may help to ask "What decision will be made based on the results of this question?" If no decisions will or can be made, you might suggest that the question should be considered "nice to answer.")
- Prioritize the categories of questions to determine if there are some categories that are more important now versus later
- Determine whether the "would be nice to answer" questions can be addressed in another way or considered as the basis for a future evaluation
- Agree on a set of questions that are of the most immediate concern

Figure 5.7 provides some example key questions.

It is impossible to say how many questions one evaluation should seek to answer, but we have found that most program evaluations include anywhere from three to five key questions, although some complex and multifaceted evaluations may require as many as ten to twelve questions. Unsurprisingly, the more questions the evaluation addresses, the more time-consuming and costly the evaluation will be. Figures 5.1–5.3 provide examples of evaluation questions within the context of an evaluation plan.

We want to restate here that these key questions focus and guide the entire evaluation process. If we fail to develop these questions and instead jump to writing questions for surveys or interview guides, as Judy and Mark did in the opening vignette of this chapter, we are simply hoping we ask the right questions. We may or may not end up asking questions that will address what we really need to know to make decisions about our programs.

Once you have completed the evaluation's focusing phase, you will (1) understand the program's theory of change from developing the program logic model, (2) understand the background and history of the program being evaluated, (3) have developed the rationale for the evaluation as well as its purpose, (4) have identified the stakeholder groups, and (5) have developed a set of questions that the evaluation will seek to answer. Once this is done, it is time to consider the various evaluation designs and methods to address the key questions. Chapters 6–11 will guide you in this process.

FIGURE 5.7 Example of Poorly Worded Key Questions and Revisions of These Questions

Poorly Worded Questions	Problems with Questions	Revisions of Those Initial Questions
Is the Supervisor Now program effective?	This is a simply yes-no question. In addition, it fails to describe how effectiveness might be defined.	In what ways do the participants use the skills learned in the Supervisor Now program?
What have you learned in the Customer Service program?	This represents a type of question that might be asked of a participant, and therefore is better suited for an interview guide or a survey.	What knowledge and skills have participants acquired in the Customer Service program?
If any of the members of the nursing assistant study group have their credits audited, will the study group be held responsible for classes that are not applicable for accreditation?	This question is very complex. In addition, it is a yes-no question.	In what ways, if any, will the nursing assistant study group be held responsible for unaccredited classes being used for accreditation purposes?
Does Report Card Night achieve its goals?	The question doesn't capture the main purpose of the evaluation, which is to improve teacher-parent communication.	To what extent does Report Card Night facilitate increased parent-teacher communication?
Is a one-day orientation sufficient for leadership training, or would a two-day orientation be more effective?	The question only offers two options as a solution. It is also unnecessarily a closed-ended question.	How much time is needed for the leadership training orientation program to be most effective?
Are docents happy with their job?	The question is worded to result in a yes-no response, when the answer is likely to be more complex. The word "happy" is also problematic in that it is difficult to operationalize.	To what extent are the docents satisfied with their experience and plan to continue volunteering at the Museum?
What impact has the Community Food Bank had on people?	The question is a bit too general. By adding children and families, it focuses the evaluation in ways that will enhance the questions used on the data collection instruments	What impact has the Community Food Bank program had on the children of the families it has served?

Keep in Mind . . .

- An evaluation plan should be developed for every evaluation.
- Developing a program logic model will help articulate the program's theory of action and change, and is critical for determining the focus of the evaluation.
- The focusing phase of the evaluation should include the evaluation's
  Rationale
  Purpose
  Stakeholders
  Key questions
- This phase of the evaluation must be completed before the evaluation's design and data collection methods are determined.