Prior Research Table

As the evaluation technical assistance partner for two portfolios of investments in Middle Years Math and Secondary Writing—funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—Mathematica developed a set of tools to support grantees through a measurement and evaluation (M&E) process. The goal of these portfolios is to develop, refine, and scale evidence-based solutions (programs, products, or practices) that demonstrate success in improving educational outcomes for students who are Black, Latino, and/or experiencing poverty (the priority communities for the grants).

To expand the reach of this work and promote the adoption of evidence-based solutions more broadly, Mathematica has adapted the suite of M&E tools for a broader set of users—organizations implementing solutions, funders, research partners, and other stakeholders. The tools are designed to help users implement the M&E process in their own work. Organizations or individuals may choose to use one tool or the full set and can adapt the tools to their needs.

What is the M&E process?

The M&E process is designed to promote rapid innovation and scaling of promising solutions through generating timely and actionable evidence about what works for whom, and in what context. It uses an iterative approach to evidence building, in which the focus and design of the research is aligned to the solution’s phase of development. Checkpoints are built in throughout to encourage users to pause and reflect on what has been learned so far and to refine the solution and the M&E plan as needed. More information on this iterative approach to evidence building and the phases of development is available [here](https://vimeo.com/528938353/76f1ece58b).

In each evidence-building phase, the M&E process has four key steps (Figure 1). In Step 1, organizations articulate their M&E goals, interests, and needs. In Step 2, they develop a plan—including research questions—to guide the M&E work. In Step 3, they execute the M&E plan designed in Step 3, including collecting the data needed to address each research question. Finally, in Step 4, organizations analyze the data they collected in Step 3, determine next steps, and report the findings.

Figure 1. Steps in the M&E process



The M&E process centers on equity and community voice as a core principle. Across all steps, organizations are encouraged to meaningfully engage community stakeholders to ensure the solution builds on the strengths and assets and meets the needs of the community it is intended to serve.

Who should use the Prior Research Table?

This tool is designed for organizations implementing solutions with support from a research partner. The research partner could be staff within the organization with expertise in evaluation, or an external organization, technical assistance provider, or consultant.

What is the Prior Research Table?

When evaluating solutions, it is important to acknowledge and build on any research previously performed on that solution. The Prior Research Table is a template for organizing existing documentation and research. Building on previous findings can help organizations evaluating solutions make adjustments to implementation, articulate research questions, and set targets for desired change in outcomes.

This resource was prepared for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Views expressed here do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the foundation.

Prior Research Table

The purpose of this tool is to help organizations document previous research on solutions to inform future evaluations. The tool starts with a question about the efforts made to understand the needs of the community the solution is intended to serve. It then provides instructions for populating the Prior Research Table.

Engagement with the priority community

1. How has your organization documented the extent to which your solution addresses the needs of the priority community (the group of people the solution is designed to or is intended to serve)? Please summarize this work at a high level.

[Click to add text]

Summary of prior research

**Instructions:** Complete Sections A to G for each study or analysis that either directly tested your solution (including impact and implementation studies) or informs your solution design. Include all studies of your solution, even those with negative or null findings.

* In Section A, list the study citation.
* In Section B, indicate whether the study tested your solution. If no studies have tested your solution, include any studies that informed the development of your solution or that you might use to support a grant application to fund implementation and evaluation.
* In Sections C to F, indicate whether each item listed applies to the study, and provide additional details in Sections D and F.
* In Section E, indicate whether the study had statistically significant positive or negative outcome findings (select “Mixed” if both were present). If there were no statistically significant findings, select “Null,” even if there was positive or negative directionality.
* In Section G, briefly describe how the study supports your organization’s implementation of the solution.

**Complete one table for each study.** (Copy and insert more table templates as needed.)

Study 1

|  |
| --- |
| A. Study citation (authors, year, title, publication information) and URL link to the study1: |
| [Click to add text] |
| B. Did this study test your solution? | [ ]  Yes [ ]  No | C. Type of study | [ ]  Implementation2 | [ ]  Pre/post | [ ]  Comparison group3 |
| D. Outcomes assessed |
| [ ]  Teacher (if checked, specify)[Click to add text] |
| [ ]  Student (if checked, specify)[Click to add text] |
| E. Statistically significant findings | [ ]  Positive | [ ]  Negative | [ ]  Mixed | [ ]  Null |
| F. Did someone outside of your organization conduct the study?  |
| [ ]  No [ ]  Yes (please specify)[Click to add text] |
| G. Describe how this study supports your solution: |
| [Click to add text] |

1 If a URL link is not available or the study has not been published, include a copy of the findings with this table.

2 Implementation refers to how the solution was delivered and whether the solution was delivered as intended (that is, with fidelity to the model).

3 A comparison group study refers to a randomized controlled trial or a matched comparison design, where the outcomes of participants receiving the solution are compared to the outcomes of similar students not receiving the solution.

Study 2

|  |
| --- |
| A. Study citation (authors, year, title, publication information) and URL link to the study1: |
| [Click to add text] |
| B. Did this study test your solution? | [ ]  Yes [ ]  No | C. Type of study | [ ]  Implementation2 | [ ]  Pre/post | [ ]  Comparison group3 |
| D. Outcomes assessed |
| [ ]  Teacher (if checked, specify)[Click to add text] |
| [ ]  Student (if checked, specify)[Click to add text] |
| E. Statistically significant findings | [ ]  Positive | [ ]  Negative | [ ]  Mixed | [ ]  Null |
| F. Did someone outside of your organization conduct the study?  |
| [ ]  No [ ]  Yes (please specify)[Click to add text] |
| G. Describe how this study supports your solution: |
| [Click to add text] |

1 If a URL link is not available or the study has not been published, include a copy of the findings with this table.

2 Implementation refers to how the solution was delivered and whether the solution was delivered as intended (that is, with fidelity to the model).

3 A comparison group study refers to a randomized controlled trial or a matched comparison design, where the outcomes of participants receiving the solution are compared to the outcomes of similar students not receiving the solution.

Study 3

|  |
| --- |
| A. Study citation (authors, year, title, publication information) and URL link to the study1: |
| [Click to add text] |
| B. Did this study test your solution? | [ ]  Yes [ ]  No | C. Type of study | [ ]  Implementation2 | [ ]  Pre/post | [ ]  Comparison group3 |
| D. Outcomes assessed |
| [ ]  Teacher (if checked, specify)[Click to add text] |
| [ ]  Student (if checked, specify)[Click to add text] |
| E. Statistically significant findings | [ ]  Positive | [ ]  Negative | [ ]  Mixed | [ ]  Null |
| F. Did someone outside of your organization conduct the study?  |
| [ ]  No [ ]  Yes (please specify)[Click to add text] |
| G. Describe how this study supports your solution: |
| [Click to add text] |

1 If a URL link is not available or the study has not been published, include a copy of the findings with this table.

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