

Step 2

Why is the Research question so important??

This overview illustrates how the research question shapes the entire research process. It is helpful for students, as they are considering topics and framing questions, to see:

- what comes next in the research process
- what they will actually do with the research question they choose
- how the question will impact everything they will do.

This example is drawn from an inter-district *TfC* program in Westchester County, New York, where the Town supervisor approached the students to ask them to help him solve a problem that had been troubling him for some time. The students, of course, appreciated the opportunity to grapple with a real-life problem.

Everything begins with developing the right research question, the entire research process flows from that question. Here we are stepping back somewhat from the task of framing a question to consider the entire research process so that your students will understand the connection between what a question asks and how steps in the research reflect that question.

Problem: *Town officials are worried about why there is a decline in voting in local elections.*

Question: *Why is voter turnout so low in Rye Town, New York?*

STEPS 1 & 2: Developing Perspectives to be able to frame Research Questions: Explain the purpose of the research and make sure that the research answers some or all of the following questions:

- a) What do town officials and others who may use our research need to know about the problem?
- b) Why is low voter turn-out in school board elections an important issue?

- c) Why should high school students care?
- d) Why should other community members care?

STEP 3: Literature Review: Find out what other researchers and community members have discovered when faced with a similar challenge.

Answer some or all of following questions:

- a) Are their people in the town who have data on voter turnout, have a special interest in voter turnout, or have worked on increasing voter turnout? If so, could we talk to them?
- b) What can we learn from other researchers who have previously written about voter turnout?
- c) What do we need to know about Rye Town to understand voter turnout—i.e. general characteristics of Rye Town and voter turnout in Rye Town?

STEP 4: Field Research, Design and Methods: How should we go about finding the answer to our research question?

Answer some or all of the following questions:

- a) Who will we talk to or what will we observe about voter turnout in Rye Town?
- b) What do we want to look for or ask these people?
- c) Given what we want to ask and who we want to question, what are the best research methods for our study—i.e. one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc.

STEP 5 & 6: Data Collection and Analysis: Look at the data.

Answers some or all of the following questions:

- a) What does our data say?
- b) Are there any surprises in our data given what we have learned from community members or other researchers?

c) What are the key findings and how do they answer the research question?

STEP 7: Policy Recommendations: How do we turn our findings into recommendations that can address the initial challenge and can be collaboratively implemented.

Answers the following questions:

a) Given our findings, who—in addition to us—should act?

b) Given our findings, what should we and others actually do?

