



RESONANCE LAB

RESEARCH QUESTION TOOLKIT



Read 02 — Research Question

THE MOVE

From that reading, the question for investigation becomes more specific. It is the note that landscape reading points to — not decided in advance, but surfaced collectively, tested and refined with the people closest to the work before being carried forward.

GROUNDING METHOD

This step is rooted in Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) — a research tradition in which the people being studied are equal partners in designing, running, and interpreting the research, not subjects observed from a distance — and, specifically, Participatory Concept Mapping — a structured, group-based method for turning many raw concerns into one prioritized, testable research question. Rather than a researcher drafting a question alone and presenting it to the community for comment, the question itself is generated, sorted, and interpreted collectively.

Grounded in: **Trochim, Concept Mapping methodology, adapted for participatory use; Allen, Schaleben-Boateng, Hang & Pergament, Concept Mapping as an Approach to Facilitate Participatory Intervention Building; core CBPR co-learning principles (Israel et al.).**

This is the approach Resonance Lab defaults to. The right depth and technique for a given engagement — timeline, budget, and who the actual stakeholders are — is a scoping conversation, not a fixed requirement.

The Instruments — Research Question

A six-part protocol, adapted from Trochim's Concept Mapping method for practitioner use.

1. Focus Prompt & Preparation

→ A2.1

Establish the generative prompt the group will respond to, and confirm who is in the room.

2. Statement Generation

→ A2.2

Brainstorm raw concerns and questions, drawing directly from the Landscape Scan and stakeholders present.

3. Structuring — Sort & Rate

→ A2.3

Sort statements into groups of similar meaning, and rate each on importance and feasibility.

4. Cluster Interpretation

→ A2.4

Name each cluster and make sense of the pattern together, as a group, not after the fact.

5. Question Drafting

→ A2.5

Convert the strongest cluster into one sharp, testable research question.

6. Utilization Check

→ A2.6

State plainly what will concretely change once this question is answered, and for whom.

This toolkit is one of nine. Full walkthrough: labresonance.com/method

A2.1 — Focus Prompt & Preparation

BEFORE YOU START

What this is: The Preparation phase of Trochim's Concept Mapping — a real, documented methodology with six named phases, not an invented step. Every session in this tradition opens with exactly one generative statement, never a list of questions.

When to use it: First. Everything from A2.2 onward exists to answer this single prompt — one prompt per engagement, not several.

How to use it: Draft the prompt as a sentence stem people complete, not a question they answer freely. That distinction is what makes the resulting statements comparable in A2.3.

Source: [Trochim – An Introduction to Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation](#)

Draft the focus prompt here before the session, and confirm who will be in the room.

Draft Focus Prompt (sentence stem)

"One specific thing about _____ that needs to be understood better in order to _____ is _____."

☐ **Participants confirmed for this session**

☐ **Session format — in person, virtual, or asynchronous written response**

A2.2 — Statement Generation

BEFORE YOU START

What this is: The Generation phase — the actual brainstorm, kept deliberately unfiltered. Every raw statement people produce in response to **A2.1**'s prompt gets recorded here exactly as said, before any judgment about which ones matter.

When to use it: Immediately once the prompt from **A2.1** is live in the room — this is not a solo drafting exercise, it runs with the group present.

How to use it: Write statements down verbatim. Sorting and rating happen next, in **A2.3** — nothing gets edited, combined, or discarded here.

Source: [Trochim – An Introduction to Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation](#)

Record every raw statement produced in response to the focus prompt, without editing or filtering at this stage. Draw statements from the session itself and from the Landscape Scan (**A1.2** through **A1.4**).

#	STATEMENT (VERBATIM)	SOURCE

A2.3 — Structuring — Sort & Rate

BEFORE YOU START

What this is: The Structuring phase — the technical core of Concept Mapping, where the raw statements from **A2.2** get sorted into meaningful groups and scored. This page and **A2.4** are two halves of one continuous step: sorting happens here, naming the resulting groups happens there.

When to use it: Only after **A2.2** is complete — every statement needs to be in front of the group before any of it gets sorted.

How to use it: Sort first, purely by similarity of meaning. Rate second, and treat importance and feasibility as two separate questions — do not let one influence the other.

Source: [Trochim – An Introduction to Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation](#)

For each statement from **A2.2**, note which group of similar-meaning statements it belongs with, then rate it on importance and feasibility, each on a scale of 1 to 5.

#	GROUP	STATEMENT	IMPORTANCE (1–5)	FEASIBILITY (1–5)

A2.4 — Cluster Interpretation

BEFORE YOU START

What this is: The second half of the Structuring phase begun in A2.3 — turning sorted groups into named, meaningful clusters. Together, A2.3 and A2.4 are Concept Mapping's participatory way of turning a room full of raw statements into shared, interpreted findings.

When to use it: Directly after A2.3's sorting is done, ideally in the same session while the groupings are still fresh.

How to use it: Name each cluster in the group's own language, not academic shorthand — that name is what carries forward into A2.5.

Source: [Allen et al. – Concept Mapping as an Approach to Facilitate Participatory Intervention Building](#)

Working from the groups formed in A2.3, name each cluster in the group's own words and summarize what it is actually about. Carry forward the average importance and feasibility ratings.

CLUSTER NAME	WHAT THIS CLUSTER IS ABOUT	AVG. IMPORTANCE	AVG. FEASIBILITY

A2.5 — Question Drafting

BEFORE YOU START

What this is: Where Concept Mapping's Utilization phase turns into this Score's own Research Question step — the strongest cluster from [A2.4](#) becomes the raw material for an actual research question.

When to use it: Once [A2.4](#) has named the strongest cluster — that cluster is what a question is being drafted from here.

How to use it: Draft more than one candidate before choosing. The checks on [A2.6](#) exist specifically to stop a question moving forward just because it was the first one written down.

Source: [Allen et al. – Concept Mapping as an Approach to Facilitate Participatory Intervention Building](#)

Draft up to three candidate research questions from the strongest cluster identified in [A2.4](#).

CANDIDATE QUESTION 1

CANDIDATE QUESTION 2

CANDIDATE QUESTION 3

A2.6 — Utilization Check

BEFORE YOU START

What this is: The last checkpoint before this whole sequence hands off — the final verification that a question is genuinely decision-useful, not just plausible.

When to use it: Last, once [A2.5](#) has produced a single chosen question.

How to use it: If any check below comes up blank, the question is not ready — return to [A2.5](#) rather than carry it forward incomplete.

Confirm the final question is decision-useful before moving forward. A question with no clear answer to any of these three is not ready yet.

☐ **What specific decision will this question's answer inform**

☐ **Who needs this answer, and by when**

☐ **What would make this question unanswerable with available methods**

→ The final research question becomes the direct input for Read 03 – Method.

Glossary

The physics, and what it means in practice. Every linked term across this document points here.

PHYSICS	PRACTICE
Medium What a wave travels through	Medium A community, organization, or society — already has its own rhythms and ways of organizing
Wave A disturbance that transfers energy through a medium	Wave Any program, policy, or strategy entering a community, organization, or society
Frequency (f) Number of wave cycles per second (Hz)	Community Frequency The rate at which a community, organization, or society repeats its core rhythms Measured by: participation rates, cultural retention indicators where participatory; usage or administrative records where not.
Frequency (f) Number of wave cycles per second (Hz)	Intervention Frequency The rate at which an introduced program, policy, or strategy repeats its own rhythm Measured by: program schedule and cadence; funding or renewal cycles.
Wavelength (λ) Distance of one full wave cycle (m)	Community Wavelength The reach of one full cultural cycle across people, geography, and generations Measured by: cultural spread, intergenerational transmission where participatory; demographic or geospatial distribution where not.
Velocity ($v = f\lambda$) How fast a wave's energy moves through the medium	Community Velocity How fast meaning and knowledge move through a community's own networks Measured by: response time to cultural events where participatory; network density or digital logs where not.
Amplitude (A) The energy or intensity of the driving force	Amplitude The intensity of resources actually committed to an intervention Measured by: dollars committed, people reached, frequency and duration of contact. <i>High amplitude with the wrong frequency is loud dissonance, not resonance.</i>

Glossary (continued)

PHYSICS	PRACTICE
f_community = f_intervention When frequency of wave matches frequency of medium	Resonance When the frequency of an intervention matches the natural frequency of a community Measured by: uptake, sustained engagement, trust where participatory; adoption or usage metrics where not. <i>If the community resonates with and amplifies the intervention, social transformation can take shape.</i>
f_beat = f_c - f_i When frequency of wave does not match frequency of medium — audible beating	Dissonance The gap between the frequency of a community and whatever is currently acting on it Measured by: drop-off and pushback where participatory; divergence in statistical or geospatial measurements where not.
A' > A at resonance Growth in a driven system's own response amplitude, greatest at resonance	Amplification What a community does with an intervention, if it resonates — carrying it further than what was put in Measured by: continued use after the engagement ends; adoption or replication beyond original delivery. <i>This is the mechanism behind social transformation — not the resources committed, but what the community does with them.</i>

Bibliography

Sources cited in the Research Question Toolkit.

Read 02	<u>Trochim — An Introduction to Concept Mapping for Planning and Evaluation</u>
Read 02	<u>Allen et al. — Concept Mapping as an Approach to Facilitate Participatory Intervention Building</u>

the cycle continues –

RESONANCE LAB

The Resonance Method – Research Question Toolkit

Extracted from The Score – 2026

Grounded in Trochim, Concept Mapping methodology, adapted for participatory use; Allen, Schaleben-Boateng, Hang & Pergament, Concept Mapping as an Approach to Facilitate Participatory Intervention Building; core CBPR co-learning principles (Israel et al.).

Full sources: Bibliography, previous page. Term definitions: Glossary.

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