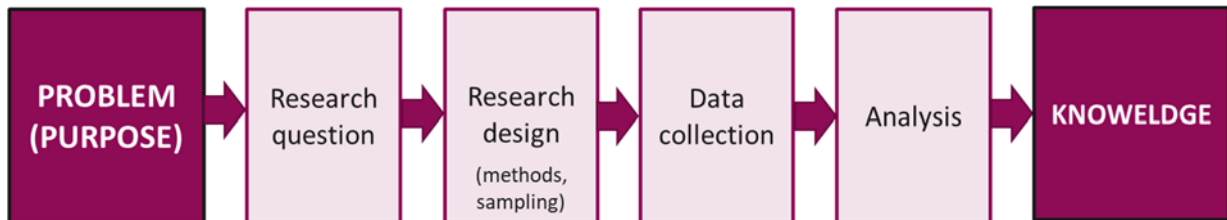


TIP SHEET: GET CLEAR ON THE RESEARCH PURPOSE

Before you start a piece of research, take time to get clear on its purpose. In good research, **purpose drives design**.



Just as a contractor would not – and could not – start construction on a road without knowing why it is needed, where it is going, who is expected to use it, how they are expected to use it, and what led to the decision to commission it, so too it makes little sense to start a piece of research without knowing the same things: why the research is needed, what kind of information is expected to come out of it, who is expected to use it, how they are expected to use it and what led to the decision to commission it.

Answers to these questions will determine all aspects of research design – from how rigorous to be, to which specific methods for data collection, sampling, and analysis to use. To get clear on research purpose, have open conversations with all the relevant stakeholders. In his excellent book *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*¹, Richard Krueger lays out the following questions to use in meetings about the research purpose.

- What is the problem that the study aims to address?
- What led up to the decision to do this study?
- What is the purpose of the study?
- What kinds of information do you want?
- What types of information are most important?
- Who wants the information? (Or who do you want to give the information to?)
- How will you use the information? (Or what do you want others to do with the information?)
- What is the next step the organisation wants to make with the information?
- Are there any ethical, legal, economic or social considerations that lead researchers to favour one research procedure over another?

It can be valuable to ask the same questions in several different ways, particularly if you sense that stakeholders' perspectives differ or are vague. It is critical to take the time ensure the stakeholders agree, and you clearly understand, what problem(s) the research is expected to address and what kinds of information are needed to address it. In some cases, this may take several conversations.

¹ Krueger, R. (2014) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide to Applied Research, Fifth Edition*. Singapore: SAGE Publications Inc. These questions are taken from Chapter 2.