

# Tips & Tools #11: End-Use Strategizing for Creating Data Collection Instruments



## Intended Use/Impact

- Why are you collecting the information? What specific purpose should it serve? Is it meant to inform/educate OR to change opinions/attitudes OR to prompt specific actions?
- Who is the intended audience you want to inform, convince or move to action? Who are likely to be your toughest critics regarding the quality of your data?
- What specific information gap do you hope to fill or what opinion/belief/action do you want to shift or achieve?
- What credibility threshold will be convincing to your intended audience? What type, source, quantity, quality, data collection methods, evaluation design will satisfy likely critics that your data is sound and represents an accurate picture of what you were investigating? This can affect the format/method you choose and number and type of questions you ask.
- How will the data be used? In presentations to decisionmakers, to citizen groups, other stakeholders OR in press releases to the media OR other ways to share results?

## Data Collection Considerations

- Who is the best source for this data? (type of source, who to include in sample, how representative of population) Who will not be convincing to your audience? Who should not be in the sample (e.g., residents of another zip code)? What sample size will be sufficient to satisfy critics? What are the “cultural characteristics of your interviewees – in terms of literacy levels, cultural contexts, language? Does the instrument need to be translated into or adapted for another language?
- \*When should this data be collected? What time of year, month, week, or day is the best time to collect it? When will it have its greatest impact for your program? Is it meant to serve as process or outcome data? How can it support your program activities? Will a single round of data collection suffice, or do you need pre- and post- measures or even multiple rounds of data collection throughout the project period? If it is important to know the time of month, day or week the data is collected, be sure to include space to record this on the data sheet. *\*[This question relates to overall evaluation planning, too.]*
- What type of analysis do you plan to do? Would it be useful to be able to break down the data by subsets of the population (for example by age, ethnicity, where someone lives, if they smoke, etc.)? If so, then you’ll need to include relevant demographic questions that will enable you to analyze data this way.
- How is this data best collected? What data collection method and format should be used? As a key informant interview? Public opinion survey? An observation? A record review? When deciding which method fits best, think about how much staff time and/or resources your program can afford to devote to collecting and analyzing the data you want to collect. Also consider how much of a priority this information is in relation to your other objectives and their evaluation activities. This will affect the scope of this evaluation activity and the design of the data collection instrument.

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- \*Who should collect the data? Who will have the greatest success in getting the data sources to share information with them? (Think in terms of experience, training, familiarity with data sources, acceptability to data sources re: language, culture, gender, age, position) – This can affect the language of your data collection instrument. *\*[It also relates to your overall evaluation planning.]*

### **Question Formation & Sequencing**

- How much time will interviewees be willing/comfortable spending on your data collection activity? This will affect how many questions you can ask.
- What topics need to be covered by the questions that will be asked? What specific pieces of information do you want to know? Create a list of specific data points to work from.
- Do you want to explore the range of possible feelings/answers on a topic (i.e., open-ended question) or are you fairly certain you understand the topic well enough that you want interviewees to choose from a set of known choices (i.e., close-ended question)?
- What is the best way to word a question to get at each data point? How will the question (and response choices) be interpreted by the interviewee? How could different wording slightly change the meaning of the question or response? It's always good to have a member of your target population work with you on this, especially to advise on cultural relevance and understanding.
- How will the answers to this question inform what you want to know? Review the questions again to make sure they will capture what you want to investigate. You may need to reword them.
- What are the likely responses you'll get for this question? Test this with a few people. For open-ended questions, will you need to probe with follow-up questions? For closed-ended questions, are all of the choices relevant and necessary? Think about which categories it would be useful to compare during analysis (e.g., when creating age ranges, do you need to distinguish between young people in their twenties and people more likely to be settled with families in their 30's and 40's? It all depends on what you're asking).
- Are the questions balanced? Do they seem to indicate a particular slant or preferred position on an issue, or is it hard to tell what the hoped-for answers might be? You want the latter.
- What sequence of questions makes the most sense? Sometimes you don't want to give any hints before you ask a question – you just want to see what the respondent comes up with. Other times it can be helpful to ask a general question first and follow it up with a more specific question once the interviewee has already been focused on the topic.

With all of the above in mind, create a draft of your data collection instrument and get feedback on it – from staff, an evaluator, coalition members, individuals from your target population. Ask them to consider if the meaning of the questions and responses are clearly understood, if any wording or examples are culturally insensitive or irrelevant, or if there are other questions you should be asking. If you have an ally from your target audience (those you hope to convince with the data) that would be willing to give you feedback, ask if the type of information you plan to collect will be convincing to likely critics. And don't forget, you can always ask the evaluation associates at TCEC to review your tools and give you feedback!

The last step of creating a quality data collection instrument is to field test it with a segment of your target population which will not be part of your intended sample. This should help identify any problematic issues with your data collection tool before you use it for collecting actual data with your sample population.

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### End-use Strategizing Worksheet

Project Objective:

Purpose of Eval. Activity	Who Data Will Inform	How Info. to Be Used	Likely Critics	Credibility Threshold
Pieces of Data	Pieces of Data	Data Sources/Formats	Types of Questions	Think about
		Sources (sample population):  Data Collection Formats:  Amount of Time They'll Spend:	Question Types:  Analysis:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will each piece of data inform your project's next steps?</li> <li>What's the best way to get at this piece of data? (How to measure it?)</li> <li>What answers am I likely to get if I ask the question this way vs. that way? (Which will be more helpful to my project?)</li> <li>When choosing question types, think about how you will analyze each question and what the data can tell you.</li> </ul>

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### End-use Strategizing Worksheet Example

**Project Objective:** By June 30, 2013, at least three community college or trade/vocational/technical schools in the Northern California region will adopt a policy that prohibits smoking on campus property.

Purpose of Eval. Activity	Who Data Will Inform	How Info. to Be Used	Likely Criticisms	Credibility Threshold
<p>To document that exposure to secondhand smoke is a problem on campus</p> <p>Show level of support on Campus</p> <p>Identify preferred policy Options</p> <p>To corroborate observation data</p>	<p>Shared governance board members which include: administrators plus faculty, staff and student representatives</p>	<p>In persuasive fact sheets to be used in meetings with key stakeholders and decisionmakers</p> <p>In press releases to generate public discourse and support in campus and local media</p>	<p>Smokers on campus (staff and students)</p> <p>Campus police force concerned with enforcement</p> <p>Campus administrators concerned with enforcement and cost of signage</p>	<p>Persuasive sample size for each campus = 350</p> <p>Need to follow and document data collection processes</p> <p>Acceptable formats: online, pen-to-paper, social media?</p>
<p><b>Pieces of Data</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exposure to secondhand smoke: y/n or frequency?</li> <li>• Awareness of harm</li> <li>• Aware of existing campus smoke-free policies</li> <li>• Level of support for smoke-free policies</li> <li>• Preferred policy options</li> <li>• Smoking status</li> <li>• Quit attempts</li> <li>• Awareness of quit help services</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pieces of Data</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic identifiers:</li> <li>• Ethnic background</li> <li>• Campus subgroup ID</li> <li>• Age (if relevant)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data Sources/Formats</b></p> <p>Sources (sample population):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Faculty</li> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• Administrators</li> </ul> <p>Data Collection Formats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online</li> <li>• Pen-to-paper</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul> <p>Amount of Time They'll Spend: 3-5 minutes</p>	<p><b>Types of Questions</b></p> <p>Question Types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Attitudes</li> <li>• Preferences</li> <li>• Demographic</li> <li>• Closed- and open-ended</li> </ul> <p>Analysis: Frequencies, cross-tabs, correlations, and content analysis (of open-ended question responses)</p>	<p><b>Think about</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will each piece of data inform your project's next steps?</li> <li>• What's the best way to get at this piece of data? (How to measure it?)</li> <li>• What answers am I likely to get if I ask the question this way vs. that way? (Which will be more helpful to my project?)</li> <li>• When choosing question types, think about how you will analyze each question and what the data can tell you.</li> </ul>