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| **Data Collection Training Done Right** | Text, logo  Description automatically generated |

Conducting evaluation activities, and doing it well, can take a lot of time—time to develop the data collection instrument, time to investigate and plan the logistics of data collection, time to actually collect the data, time to clean and analyze it and time to write up the results. After investing all of those staff and volunteer hours, the last thing you want to end up with is unreliable data!

That’s where data collector training comes in. **Whenever two or more data collectors will be administering a survey to respondents or making observations, the project must conduct a data collector training so that everyone understands the survey or observation in exactly the same way.** The aim of the training is to create a shared understanding of how to conduct the evaluation activity so that the data collection protocol is conducted consistently, as designed, and without variation. Getting reliable and accurate data depends on it!

The World Health Organization notes that, “poor survey prep, including inadequate training of survey personnel, results in onerous and time-consuming data checking that can significantly delay the survey’s completion. It is therefore more effective and efficient to apply rigorous data collection methods than to try to clean or correct data once they are already collected.”

So don’t skimp on training activities! Be sure to allow enough time for the team to thoroughly get familiar with the data collection protocol and practice administering it until they can do so without error. Depending on how long and complex the instrument is, the training could take as little as one hour to as much as several days!

So what makes for a rigorous data collector training? Here are some tips:

* Train all supervisors and data collectors together to ensure consistency.
* Hold the training just before data collection starts so instructions are fresh in mind.
* In addition to the actual instrument or form, provide a clear, written protocol that gives instructions and the intent of each question.
* Create a non-threatening environment for trainees to ask questions.
* Allow sufficient time for everyone to practice and receive constructive feedback.
* Assess data collector accuracy (inter-rater reliability) and readiness.
* Include time for field practice in real life situations that won’t be part of the actual data sample to allow data collectors to try out the protocol. Do a thorough debriefing to address remaining questions and to correct any inaccuracies you observe.
* Monitor actual data collection and provide team check-ins and debriefings the first few days of data collection and then sporadically throughout the field work.

## References

World Health Organization. 2008. “Measuring medicine prices, availability, affordability and price components,”

2nd ed., p.55 <https://haiweb.org/publication/measuring-medicine-prices-availability-affordability-and-price-components-2nd-ed/>

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/node/17592>