

Script for Captivate Tutorial “Collecting Data for Your VISTA Project”

Slide 1: Introduction

Welcome to “Measuring Results for Your VISTA Project”. This tutorial will help you plan and implement data collection to measure performance milestones for your VISTA project.

This tutorial was developed by Project STAR in cooperation with the Corporation for National and Community Service. If you have questions, please contact Project STAR by emailing us at star@jbsinternational.com or by calling us at 1-800-548-3656.

This tutorial moves at a pace set by you. To advance to the next slide, simply click the forward arrow in the control panel at the bottom of the slide. Click the forward arrow now to continue.

Slide 2: Tutorial Agenda

This tutorial covers:

1. Some basic terms;
2. The six steps to plan for data collection;
3. Developing a data collection plan;
4. Example of a data collection instrument;
5. And additional resources to help you measure results for your VISTA project.

A short, optional quiz is also available at the end of this tutorial to enhance your learning experience.

Slide 3: Five Steps to Assessing Results

Let’s begin with a quick overview of the process of measuring results for VISTA. If you’ve watched the previous tutorial you’ll recall that this five-step process include developing the VISTA project plan, developing instruments, collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting results. The present tutorial focuses on steps 2 and 3 of this process, developing instruments and collecting data. For a more complete overview of the five-step process to assess results and for more information on step one of the process, see the tutorial, “Getting Started with the VISTA Project Plan”.

Slide 4: Let’s begin with some basic terms...

Let’s define some basic terms that are used in this tutorial.

Data are the raw numbers and other information you collect on a regular basis to measure the results of your VISTA project. These data are used to determine if you met the performance milestone targets identified in your project plan.

A data source is the person or place where you get your data. Data sources can include VISTA members, community volunteers, program staff, agency records, and community beneficiaries.

Slide 5: A few more basic terms...

An indicator is a measurable piece of information showing progress toward reaching a performance milestone. Indicators answer the question, “What is my *evidence* that we reached the milestone?”

Each performance milestone includes a target, which identifies the amount of change you expect to see in one year.

Indicators are measured using an instrument, which is a form or document used to collect data from the data source. Examples of instruments include activity logs, questionnaires, and interview guides.

Slide 6: The Six Steps to Plan for Data Collection

Measuring results for your VISTA project involves collecting relevant information in a systematic way to determine if your project is achieving the results you intended.

Planning and implementing data collection involves the following steps.

- First, identify the relevant data types and sources. Make an inventory of the types of data you will need to collect, where you will collect the data, and from whom you will collect the data.
- Second, identify who will be involved in data collection. This includes your data collectors, the people who will provide data (often called respondents), and any other stakeholders who should have a say in the process.
- Third, set a schedule for data collection. Consider not only when you will need the data but also when data are likely to be available. Be sure to check in with stakeholders as you develop a timetable for data collection.
- Fourth, train your data collectors. This is necessary to ensure that data are collected accurately and consistently.
- Fifth, pilot test your instruments and the data collection process. Pilot testing can help you spot and eliminate problems early on.
- Finally, implement your data collection process. Stay on top of this process throughout the year to ensure timely follow-through by all the players.

These six steps constitute your *data collection plan*, and are described more fully in the next six slides.

Slide 7: Planning for Data Collection, Step 1: Identify data types and sources.

The process of planning for data collection begins by looking at your VISTA project plan. Look at the performance milestones in your project plan to see what kinds of data you will need to collect to measure each result, or milestone. Milestones include information about the indicator (or “evidence of progress”), the target, the tool or instrument you will use to collect the data (“how measured”), and a description of the data collection process.

For each performance milestone, ask yourself the following key questions.

- What types of data do I need?
- Where or who will I get it from?
- When will I need it?

Slide 8: Planning for Data Collection, Step 2—Identify who will be involved.

Next, consider the players or stakeholders in the data collection process. Early stakeholder involvement in planning for data collection allows you to get buy-in. It also allows you to look for opportunities to piggy-back on existing data collection efforts.

Most data collection for VISTA projects involves having VISTA members track the completion of tasks via logs, tally sheets and so forth. Contact organizations and agencies you are partnering with for the VISTA project to find out if they already collect the information you need and whether they can share it with you. Consider partner agencies and other players whose cooperation you may require to get this type of data. Ask yourself:

- Whose permission do we need to collect the data? How will we get their permission?
- Will the data be available in a format that allows us to respond to the targets in our VISTA project plan?
- Is the data available whenever we need it, or is it only available on a set schedule? Can we get the data in time for progress reports?

Slide 9: Planning for Data Collection, Step 3—Set a schedule.

The next step is to set a schedule or timetable for collecting the data. This involves making sure that data will be available when you need them. Mark your calendar to identify the dates when data should be collected.

Also, consider when your VISTA progress reports will be due, and make sure you can get the data in time for these reports.

Slide 10: Planning for Data Collection, Step 4—Train the data collectors.

In step 2 you identified who will collect the data. Step 4 involves training your data collectors. Consider what kind of training data collectors will need to collect data accurately and consistently. Training data collectors includes:

- Walking them through the data collection forms;
- Providing them with written instructions;
- Asking data collectors to practice filling out the forms;
- Providing them with examples of correctly completed forms, and;
- Allowing data collectors to practice or role play the data collection process.

Slide 11: Planning for Data Collection, Step 5—Pilot test the data collection process.

The next step is pilot testing. This involves simulating the process you will follow when you actually collect the data. This step is essential to detect and resolve problems with the instruments and the data collection process.

Keep the pilot test as realistic as possible by simulating the actual data collection procedures. For instruments like logs and tally sheets, pilot testing can be part of the same process in which you train the data collectors. Be sure to modify instruments as needed based on your pilot test.

Slide 12: Planning for Data Collection, Step 6—Putting your data collection process into action

The last step is to go out and collect the data.

Adopt a hands-on approach to ensure that everyone follows through on their responsibilities in a timely manner. Give extra attention to any players who you think are particularly likely to “drop the ball”.

Make sure everyone knows where and how to return completed instruments.

Be prepared to make adjustments and fine-tune the process as you move forward.

Keep in mind that while your progress reports do not contain raw data, the Corporation will ask you to explain how data were collected and can ask to see your original documentation. It is always a wise to retain the raw data. This means that in addition to any periodic reports VISTAs submit to you, they should also collect and submit their raw data. You can ask them to append the raw data to their periodic reports.

Slide 13: Data Collection Plan Worksheet

Project STAR has developed this handy, optional worksheet to help you plan data collection. The data collection plan specifies who will do each step and when they will do it. You may need to develop a worksheet like this for each milestone.

Developing a data collection plan improves your chances for successfully collecting data. It's also a great way to get stakeholder buy-in. Give copies of the relevant data collection plans to VISTA members when you give them their VISTA assignment descriptions.

In this example, we have already filled in the first five rows with information from the VISTA project plan. The last seven rows deal with the steps to collect data for the milestone. In this example, a VISTA project is developing systems to support recruitment of community volunteers. The project needs to track the number of volunteers recruited. The target is that 45 volunteers will be recruited by July, 2009.

As you fill in the rest of this plan, keep in mind that your VISTA project plan may already contain some relevant information to help you fill in the remaining cells. For example, look at the field labeled “description of data collection process” in your project plan to see if it already contains some information about how you intend to collect the data.

Slide 14: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: Respondents/Number of Measurements

The respondents or number of measurements is where you describe who will complete each instrument and how many copies of the instrument will be completed. When an instrument does not include respondents, such as with a tally sheet, you may prefer to provide an estimate of the number and frequency of measurements to be taken.

In this example, the VISTA members will complete one copy of the Volunteer Recruitment Log after each of four recruitment events.

Slide 15: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: Data Collection

The data collection row is where you describe who will collect the data and how often this will be done.

In this example, VISTA members will complete a recruitment log for each event. Note that VISTAs are collecting raw data on the spot rather than relying on memory or estimation when they fill out a periodic report some time after the event. This is the best way to collect this type of data.

Slide 16: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: Training Needs of Data Collectors

The training needs row is where you describe any training that will be provided to the data collectors, including who will be trained, when, and what role they will play.

In this example, the project director will show VISTAs how to complete the log in January, before any volunteer recruitment events.

Slide 17: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: Data Aggregation

The data aggregation row describes who is responsible for gathering up the completed instruments and preparing them for analysis.

In this example, VISTAs will return completed logs to the project director after each volunteer recruitment event.

Slide 18: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: Data Analysis

The data analysis row describes who will analyze the data in preparation for reports and when this will happen.

In this example, the project director will tally up the number of volunteers recruited in time for the July report.

Slide 19: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: CNCS Reporting

The CNCS reporting row describes who will write the progress report and when it is due.

In this example, the project director will complete reports that are due in July and January.

Slide 20: Data Collection Plan Worksheet: Reporting Loop

The last row is the where you describe any other ways in which you will report the data to stakeholders.

In this example, the project director will share volunteer recruitment figures with the agency's board of directors in July.

Slide 21: Methods of Data Collection

As you develop data collection plans, you will need to consider the methods you will use to collect the data. Carefully consider the method you propose to use. Do you need to measure a change or improvement in beneficiaries? Some methods, like logs and tally sheets, do not measure outcomes. Do respondents have trouble reading? Some methods require respondents to be able to read. Do you need numerical information? You might not get this kind of data from focus groups. The best methods choice depends on what you are measuring and the type of information you need.

To learn more about some common methods of data collection, move your mouse over each of the icons below. VISTA projects tend to rely on logs, tally sheets more than other methods to collect data. For more information on surveys and interviews, check out Project STAR's instrument resources for Senior Corps and AmeriCorps State and National programs.

Brief pause

Click the forward arrow in the control panel at the bottom of the slide when you're ready to move on.

Slide 22: Data Collection Instrument - Example

Here is an example of an instrument the VISTA project might use to track the development of volunteer recruitment and management systems for the mentoring program. You can download a copy of this instrument from the same web page where you accessed this tutorial and modify it to fit your own needs.

Well-designed instruments include clear titles and instructions.

Data collection for VISTA projects often involves tracking important tasks completed by VISTAs as they build program infrastructure. It is very important to have good tools to track this work. The tools should detail out the steps required to complete important tasks. Also, when appropriate, your tools should include a place where a staff member signs off to ensure the quality of work completed by VISTAs. To develop tools like this one for your own project, start by looking at your VISTA assignment descriptions. Many of the steps identified in the VISTA assignment descriptions translate directly into the elements you'll want to include in your data collection tools.

Slide 23: Designing Good Instruments—Avoiding Biases in Your Data

Here are a couple of tips for avoiding biased data, especially when collecting data from service clients.

When asking beneficiaries of VISTA service for information, whenever possible, rely on a “neutral party” to collect your data. While VISTA members can be a valuable resource for collecting data, they may not always be the best choice for this role if they provided the service directly to the individuals completing an instrument.

Also, give respondents assurances of confidentiality or anonymity, and abide by those assurances.

Slide 24-29: Test Your Knowledge

We are nearly at the end of this tutorial. You are invited to take a few minutes to enhance your learning experience with a short quiz. Please click “Take Quiz” to test your knowledge, or click “Skip Quiz” to go to the end.

Slide 30: Additional Resources and Project STAR Contact Information

This concludes “Measuring Results for Your VISTA Project”.

For more information, please contact your Corporation State Office.

You can access Project STAR resources online at the National Service Resource Center.

You can also reach Project STAR by telephone at 1-800-548-3656, and by email at star@jbsinternational.com.