

# Eleven Proven Ways to Improve Data Collection

## 1. **Get early buy-in from stakeholders.**

Get buy-in from partner sites and agencies (and other important stakeholder) while developing the Project Plan and selecting performance measures. See if the data you need is something they already collect or are willing to collect and share with your VISTA project.

## 2. **Start with success.**

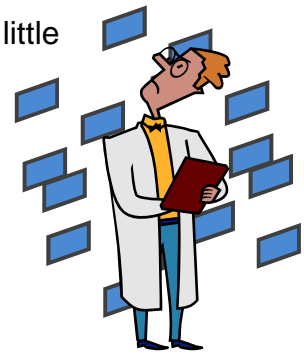
Begin your data collection efforts with those sites that can and will provide the data to you in a timely manner.

## 3. **Identify your helpers (data collectors).**

Consider using your VISTA members to help collect data for you. With a little training on how to use the instruments, VISTA members can often be a great source of information. They are there and see it all!

## 4. **Train your VISTA members (data collectors).**

This does not need to be complicated but should happen. Do data collectors know what to say? Where to turn in the information? How to respond to questions? How to protect confidentiality? Check out the "Data Collection Packet" available at [www.nationalservicerresources.org](http://www.nationalservicerresources.org) (search: project star) or give us a call (800-548-3656).



## 5. **Identify appropriate methods.**

Part of the problem with collecting data may be the method. Consider what method you are using to collect your data. Many National Service programs use surveys to collect data but this may not always be the best method, and depends on the population you are measuring. In some cases a log to document tasks completed, or a checklist to assess the quality of materials created by VISTA members, is more appropriate. Check out instrument development resources available at [www.nationalservicerresources.org](http://www.nationalservicerresources.org) (search: project star) or give us a call (800-548-3656).

## 6. **Identify appropriate data sources.**

One challenge is getting the information from the data source, the person or organization that provides the data. You may have an excellent instrument but it is difficult to get the data back from the data source. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to identify another data source, either because it's easier to get the data back or because data from this source will be stronger.

## 7. **Provide confidentiality.**

Obtaining data from respondents can be difficult if they are concerned that their information will be shared with others, or that they will be identified in the report. Always inform respondents of the anonymity or confidentiality guidelines and **abide by those guidelines**.

**8. Encourage respondents to give you the information you need.**

Keep instruments short, provide directions, inform folks about how you will use the information, offer incentives (food!), and use a captive audience. These are all ways to make sure respondents complete the instruments.

**9. Use low burden methods and processes.**

Integrate data collection with on-going processes. Are VISTA members supposed to follow a set of guidelines when developing new materials for the program? Then you can incorporate these same guidelines into a checklist used to assess the quality of these materials once they are developed. Do the schools already conduct an intake and exit interview for volunteer tutors? Consider adding a question or two that pertains to the outcomes identified in your Project Plan. Many agency partners already do intakes or exit forms. Build on those!

**10. Set a schedule**

Timing is a critical element of data collection. Be sensitive to the schedule of data collection at project sites. Coordinate your data collection efforts with the availability of the information you need. You will only increase resistance if you push people to give you data before it is available to be collected.

**11. Pilot your process.**

Make sure that you can really get the data you need. For example, if you want youth employment statistics from the city for a particular area, check in with your contact to make sure the data will be available when you need them, and for the population you are serving.

***If you need help with a challenging data collection situation,  
call Project STAR 800-548-3656 to get 1-on-1 assistance.***