

Common Data Collection Methods

Standardized Tests



Characteristics: Pre-existing tests with a large group of respondents. Tests are administered at two points in time (i.e., the beginning and end of activities).

Advantages: They offer a rigorous, ready-made context for documenting improvement. They are widely accepted as credible evidence if appropriate for the activity. They may allow for comparison across programs or schools.

Constraints: The tests may not be designed to measure outcomes the program expects. They lose validity if changes in content, administration, or context occur. Usually cost money to obtain.

Developed Measures



Characteristics: Pre-existing, published tests or inventories. Tests or inventories may be administered at two points in time (i.e., the beginning and end of activities).

Advantages: They offer a context for documenting improvement more closely matched to your program services than standardized tests. They are accepted as credible evidence if appropriate for the activity. They may allow for comparison across programs or schools.

Constraints: The tests may not be designed to measure outcomes the program expects. Some inventories or tests may cost money to obtain.

Rubrics and Alternative Assessments



Characteristics: Rubrics and other alternative assessment measures such as journals and goal setting can be used to measure changes in your beneficiaries. Rubrics provide a detailed scale that can be used to measure performance. Rubrics are used either with other records, such as portfolios or written work, or with direct performance, such as conversation.

Advantages: Alternative assessments can be used to measure a variety of abilities and behaviors. When well constructed, they are relatively easy to administer

Constraints: Developing a good rubric and alternative assessments takes time. Off-the-shelf instruments may be useful, but you need to match the rubric to the services you provide. Individuals administering a rubric must be thoroughly trained in its use.

Pre/Post Program-Based Instruments



Characteristics: An alternative to existing tests. Programs can create tests to document specific knowledge or performance that capture gains directly related to program activities. These tests are administered at two or more points in time (e.g., the beginning, quarterly, and the end of activities).

Advantages: The tests are widely accepted as credible evidence of accomplishments, if they are directly related to the services provided. They must be administered to respondents both before their participation (a "pre-test") and upon the conclusion of their participation (a "post-test").

Constraints: It is difficult to verify the degree to which the responses to test questions are an accurate representation of changes in knowledge or skills because of the program. They may not show changes in a consistent manner.

Logs or Tally Sheets



Characteristics: Logs and tally sheets document a participant's attendance or achievement. These can also be used to record grades, attendance and other information collected about students.

Advantages: Logs and tally sheets are performance-based. They accommodate a range of starting and ending points and are easy to complete.

Constraints: Data may not be useful if observation/recording is not systematic. Logs should include specific questions or categories directly tied to the results and indicators to prompt the user.