COLLECT MEANINGFUL DATA: Conducting a Data Review

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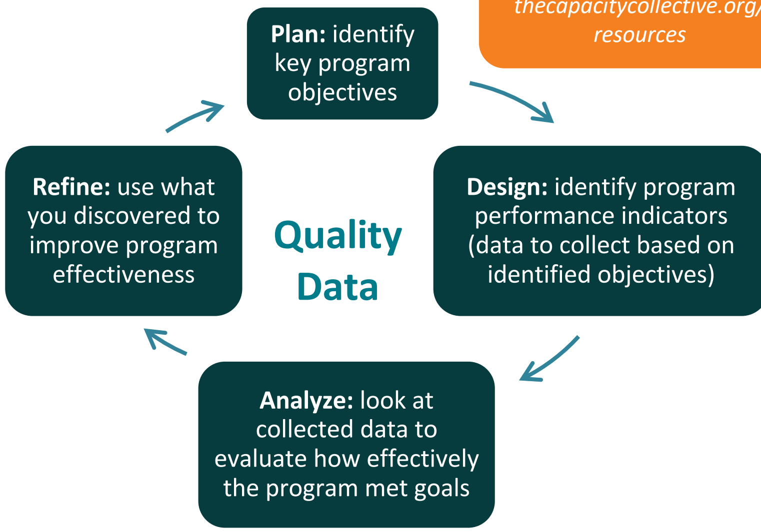
Purpose: This tool is intended to help you take a step back and think through the data you are collecting. Are there any adjustments you may want to make to ensure you have the most *useful* data possible? The data you collect should ideally help your program:

- Provide evidence that the change you are working toward is actually happening.
- Assist in decision making/program adjustments.
- Provide data you can use to advocate for funding and support.
- Motivate all stakeholders, including staff, partner organizations, and clients.

Below are some steps to help guide you through the data review process.



Process of Telling your Story with Data

How do you get from your program mission to a useful dashboard, using the data you collect? The steps below show you how.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Big picture: why does this program exist?	What are your ideal outcomes and successes?	Who needs to hear your story?	What information tells your story?	What is the "before and after" for your story?	What categories of data do you want to collect?
Program Mission	Specific Questions/ Outcomes	Interested Stakeholders	Data/ Success Indicators	Comparison/ Target	Disaggregate

1 Focus the Data You Collect on the Program Mission

The mission the **overarching goal** that leads the work you do. Think about your mission to help choose what you collect and why.

2 Define Specific Questions/Outcomes

To help determine the most important program outcomes, ask:
"We know our program is working well when______?"
You can break this question down by considering the outcomes your program seeks for each group you work with. This may include children, caregivers, internal staff, and/or the broader community.

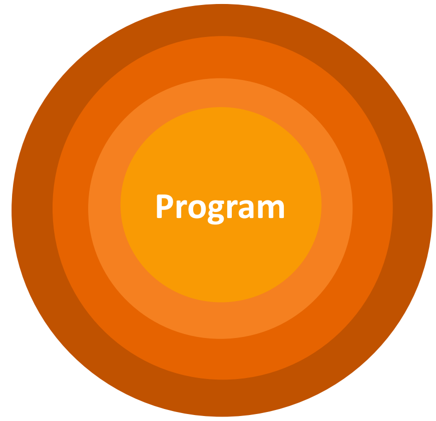
Note: Tools such as a logic model, strategic plan, RFP, or defined program purpose and goals, provided by external stakeholders or developed internally, can also be used to clearly define the key program objectives.

3 Identify Interested Stakeholders

You are responsible to many different people and groups. Each may each be interested in different program outcomes. See below for examples of stakeholders you may want to consider:

- **Direct:** supervisors, program staff, clients
- **Internal:** Board, development, other programs in org
- **Community:** other programs, referral sources
- **Funders/Program Models:** BSK, other potential funders

After determining the outcomes your stakeholders are asking for, you can determine *who* should see what information when you put together dashboards for each stakeholder.



4 Determine Data/Indicators

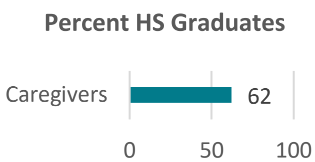
Once program outcomes/objectives are established, you can explore which **indicators will show the extent to which the program is achieving these outcomes**. Indicators define what data you need to collect. Good indicators are:

- **Direct**: represent what we want to measure
- **Useful:** help with decisions, motivate, help advocate
- **Attributable:** clearly linked to program impact
- **Practical:** minimum number of indicators for outcome

This is not an exact science! Indicators should be helpful, but don't need to perfectly determine if an outcome is achieved.

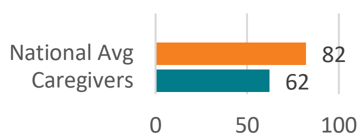
5 Establish a Target/Comparison

For each indicator, **select a goal, target, or comparison when possible**. These may be based on contract requirements (like 42 visits per year), comparisons to national averages, or internal goals. Without them, it may be hard to determine if the achievement shown by the indicator is on track or needs attention.



No target or comparison

VS.



Data compared to nat'l avg.

6 Decide How to Disaggregate

How do you want to break up the data to understand it better? What is useful to know? For example, if you were looking at client satisfaction, you may want to divide data by caregiver age. If a higher percentage of caregivers under 22 years old seemed less satisfied with your program, you could look deeper into why this might be and adjust your program accordingly. When deciding how would be most useful to disaggregate data, you may consider demographic factors such as child/caregiver age, child/caregiver race, household composition, family income, and caregiver education level, among others.

Cultural Humility in Data

Culture can be defined in many ways. It may include shared experiences of people, including values, customs, beliefs, ways of knowing and communicating, and worldviews. Data collection and analysis processes are never culture neutral. Because of this, it is important to consider inevitable bias and limitations in this work. The American Evaluation Association summarizes some best practices for cultural humility in its "Public Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation":

Acknowledge the complexity of cultural identity.
Cultural Groupings are not static.
People belong to multiple cultures.
Important to not make assumptions.

Recognize dynamics of power.
Especially important in thinking about data collection. Power dynamics are part of client/provider relationships.

Recognize and eliminate bias in language.
Reflect the community appropriately, in their own voices, when sharing results.

Use culturally appropriate methods.
Pilot test or share results with members of the community to seek feedback.
Take care when interpreting data—consider your bias.