COMPILING IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION FINDINGS ACROSS DATA SOURCES

Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) grant recipients can use data from multiple sources to meaningfully answer research questions for an implementation evaluation. By collecting multiple perspectives on a topic, researchers and evaluators can gain more robust insight into that topic. For instance, when seeking to understand youth's satisfaction with SRAE programming, you might hold a focus group with some youth participants, interview parents of some youth participants, and conduct a survey with all youth

> **Respondents** refers to the people participating in the focus group or interview.

participants. Across respondents from each data source, you might find a consistent pattern of findings. However, you might find discrepancies across the data sources. This guide helps SRAE grant recipients address these discrepancies by first identifying considerations for understanding them, then presenting two scenarios as examples of how researchers might make sense of and think critically about discrepancies. The guide concludes by offering practical tips for next steps when compiling implementation evaluation findings across data sources.

Considerations for interpreting findings that differ across data sources

If you collect data from multiple data sources on a particular topic, and the findings across these sources differ, you should brainstorm why. This will help provide context and an explanation for your results. For instance, you might consider the following questions:

- **Are the data collection tools leading to biased responses?**

  - Could any questions in your interview or focus group discussion guide be considered leading questions? The phrasing of a leading question might compel respondents to answer a certain way, which could bias their answers. (See Developing Questions for Focus Groups and Interviews in Toolkit 2 for more information on writing questions for interview or focus groups.)

  - Were any questions asked in focus groups, interviews, surveys, or other data collection methods unclear or confusing?

- **Were the respondents representative of the full population served?**

  - Did you collect data from a subset of youth? If so, were they similar to all the youth you serve? For instance, did you collect data from youth across all the grades your program serves or only some grades?

  - Did you collect data from a subset of schools or community-based organizations? If so, are these schools or organizations similar to all of the sites you serve, or do they differ in demographics, size, services offered, culture, or other factors?

- Did your sample include the full range of viewpoints on the topic? For instance, you might know that some community members have concerns about SRAE programming, and others are more supportive. Did your interviews with community members include people with both perspectives, or only one?

- **What was the timing of data collection?**

  - If you collected data over several months or years, did the implementation context change over time? For instance, did any local or state policies change? Did any staff leave, or were new staff hired that might have affected implementation? Did the programming change over time?

  - If the implementation context changed over time, did you collect data before and after the change?

Examples of understanding differences across data sources

Below are two examples that include hypothetical scenarios with different findings across data sources and possible explanations for these differences.

Scenario 1. Youth's reaction to the program

To answer a research question about youth's reaction to the SRAE program, an SRAE grant recipient collected data from youth in focus groups and exit surveys. The focus groups and surveys asked youth to describe their reactions both to the program overall and to the materials and visual aids. Table 1 summarizes these data sources and the findings.

Table 1. Data sources and findings for Scenario 1

	Focus groups with youth	Youth exit survey
Respondents	20 youth (two focus groups with 10 youth each)	200 youth
Timing of data collection	Spring 2022	Spring 2022
Findings	- Data suggested that youth were very satisfied with the program. - Youth described enjoying the lessons and reported they found the materials and visual aids relatable. - Focus group respondents said they looked forward to the rest of the semester, because they enjoyed the programming so much.	- Just over half (55 percent) of youth reported being satisfied with the program overall. - Across multiple survey items, the lowest scores were for youth's response to materials and visual aids: only 42 percent of youth were satisfied.

The findings differed by data source, with findings from the focus groups indicating more positive reactions to the program than findings from the survey data. When trying to make sense of these different findings, the grant recipient considered the following questions and came to the following conclusions:

- **Were the focus group participants similar to all the youth served by the program?** Out of 200 youth served, 20 participated in the focus group. These 20 individuals might not be similar to the entire group of youth served. In fact, the grant recipient realized that nearly all of the focus group participants were in 9th grade, while most participants in their program overall were in 10th or 11th grade. Perhaps younger youth have a more positive reaction to the program than older youth. The grant recipient might need to collect more data to assess that hypothesis systematically.

- **Did youth understand what the survey items were asking?** Youth might have interpreted the survey questions differently than anticipated. After talking to some of the former program participants, the grant recipient discovered that some youth were not clear about which materials and visual aids the survey question was referring to, so their responses to the survey items might not be completely accurate.

Scenario 2. Context of implementation

To answer a research question about the context of program implementation, an SRAE grant recipient working with a large high school interviewed the program facilitators and surveyed teachers and support staff at the school. Both the interviews and surveys asked about school leaders' support for the SRAE program. Table 2 summarizes these data sources and findings.

Table 2. Data sources and findings and findings for Scenario 2

	Interviews with facilitators	School staff survey
Respondents	4 facilitators	15 teachers and support staff at the school
Timing of data collection	Fall 2019	Spring 2021
Findings	• All facilitators felt the principal was skeptical about implementing the SRAE program during the school day.	• 80 percent of the teachers and support staff indicated that the principal and other school leaders supported the program.

In this scenario, the survey findings indicated more support from school leaders than the interviews revealed. When trying to make sense of these findings, the grant recipient considered the following question and came to the following conclusion:

- **When was the data collected?** Interviews with facilitators took place at the beginning of the program in fall 2019; the survey was administered in spring 2021. From talking

anecdotally with facilitators over the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 school years, the grant recipient learned that facilitators had been able to build rapport with school staff over time, which might have contributed to school leaders' support for the program growing over time. In addition, in fall 2020, the school hired a new assistant principal who seems to be more supportive of SRAE programming. Finally, the interviews took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, while the survey took place during the pandemic. It is possible that school leaders recognized that youth had more social and emotional health needs during the pandemic, and that the SRAE programming could help address those needs. This factor might have increased their support for the program. To better understand the changes in support from school leaders over time, this grant recipient might need to collect more information from facilitators or school staff.

Practical next steps for researchers

- **Consider reviewing interim findings.** Rather than waiting until the end of your evaluation period to analyze data, you can analyze data periodically, such as after each school year. This approach might help you identify possible discrepancies in data across sources throughout the evaluation, giving you time to explore them in later data collection efforts. If it seems like unclear data collection tools are causing these discrepancies, you might want to edit the tools. Alternatively, you might wish to add questions to the tools to probe deeper on possible explanations for the discrepancies.

- **Seek feedback on findings from respondents or others involved in the program.** To help validate your interpretation of discrepant findings, you might want to present the findings and your interpretation of them to respondents or others involved in the program. You can ask for feedback on your interpretation or whether they have any alternative explanations. This process can challenge your assumptions and help you consider a range of interpretations for your findings.

- **Be up-front about discrepancies when reporting your findings.** When presenting your findings verbally or in writing, you should describe findings from all the data sources you planned to use, even if there are discrepancies, rather than picking results from just one data source. You can identify and try to explain any discrepancies you saw across data sources. This approach will give the audience a full picture of your findings and support transparency in your evaluation work.

- **Identify the limitations of your study.** The discrepancies in your findings might derive from a flaw within a data collection tool, such as a misleading or unclear question. Discrepancies might also arise because of challenges with data collection, such as low response rates on a survey leading to a nonrepresentative sample of respondents. You can include a section in your reporting describing these limitations. This section will demonstrate your understanding that there are aspects of the study that could not be addressed. You might also use these limitations to identify opportunities for future research.