DATA SOURCES FOR COMMON IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION RESEARCH QUESTIONS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This document provides information for Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) grant recipients who want to know which data sources can help them answer common research questions in implementation evaluations. Common research question topics include the following:

- Dosage
- Fidelity of program delivery
- Quality of program delivery
- Implementation context
- Youth reactions to the program
- Staff reactions to the program

Most implementation evaluations rely on data from multiple sources to answer their research questions. This document gives examples of possible data sources SRAE grant recipients can use to answer questions on each of these topics. However, the listed data sources are not exhaustive; you may find other data sources that help you answer your research questions. This document concludes with some things to consider when deciding which data sources to use in an implementation evaluation.

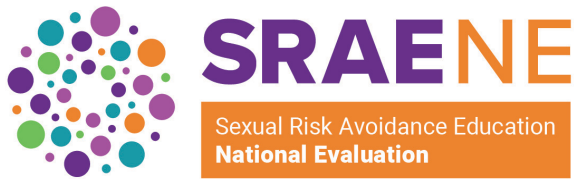## What data sources can be used to answer a research question on dosage?

Dosage refers to the amount of the program that youth receive. It is typically measured as the percentage of program sessions or activities that each youth attended, or the amount of content each youth received.

Example research question: On average, how much of the program did youth receive?

Possible data sources: (1) Attendance records from partner sites or records that facilitators complete after each lesson; and (2) fidelity logs or observations that track the amount of content facilitators delivered in each lesson throughout the program.

What data sources can be used to answer a research question on fidelity?

Fidelity is the degree to which program implementation occurred as intended. Many SRAE programs use a scripted curriculum and have specific guidance on what should happen in each

lesson. To measure fidelity, an implementation evaluation can examine whether the actual program implementation matched the intended program implementation from the curriculum.

Example research question: To what extent did facilitators deliver the curriculum as intended?

Possible data sources: (1) Fidelity logs that facilitators complete after each lesson; (2) observations of program lessons or facilitator training; (3) interviews or focus groups with program and partner staff; and (4) surveys of program staff.

What data sources can be used to answer a research question about quality?

Quality refers to how well the facilitators delivered the program, which can include ensuring the content is accessible and relevant to youth and being responsive to the needs of the youth.

Example research question: How well did the facilitators engage with students and answer their questions correctly?

Possible data sources: (1) Observations of program sessions; (2) interviews or focus groups with program or partner staff; (3) interviews or focus groups with youth; and (4) surveys of youth.

What data sources can be used to answer a research question about context?

Context refers to external events, policies, or programs that could affect SRAE program implementation. Sometimes unexpected events—such as natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic—can keep SRAE grant recipients from implementing their programs the way they expected to. In addition, state or local policy changes, procedures at schools, or other programming in the service area could influence SRAE programming.

Example research question: What policies affected SRAE program implementation?

Possible data sources: (1) Interviews or focus groups with program or partner staff; (2) surveys of program staff or youth; (3) documents summarizing school or local policies; (4) information on other programs serving youth in the community; and (5) news stories about recent policy changes that might influence programming.

What data sources can be used to answer a research question about youth reactions to a program?

An evaluation might want to examine how youth participating in an SRAE program experience or view the program. These might include how youth responded to the SRAE program and their attitudes or feelings about it, including what worked well and what could be improved.

Example research question: Which topics in the SRAE program resonated most with youth, and why?

Possible data sources: (1) Interviews or focus groups with youth; (2) interviews or focus groups with program or partner staff; and (3) surveys of youth.

What data sources can be used to answer a research question about staff reactions to a program?

Staff reactions are how SRAE or partner staff experience or view the SRAE program. This might include their feelings about implementing the program or their perceptions of how the program does or does not work for youth.

Example research question: Which topics or activities did facilitators feel least comfortable delivering, and why?

Possible data sources: (1) Interviews or focus groups with program or partner staff; and (2) surveys of program staff.

What are some considerations for deciding which data sources to use in an implementation evaluation?

Research questions might require different data sources depending on the topic. Table 1 lists the data sources that could help you answer different types of research questions. There is not necessarily a right or wrong answer when deciding what data source is most appropriate; typically, you can use more than one data source to help answer a research question. For example, both a survey and an interview are appropriate for collecting information on youth reactions to the program after they have finished it. When determining which data source is most appropriate, SRAE grant recipients should consider two key issues:

- **The type of data that could answer the research question.** Reflect on the kind of information each source would provide and whether that would be enough to answer specific research questions.

- **The practicality of collecting data from each source, along with the time and energy needed to collect them.** For example, if school partners already collect accurate attendance data, and the schools are willing to share those data with the SRAE team, the implementation evaluation likely should use school attendance records to measure dosage. However, if the process of getting data from the school would be too time consuming, or if the data they could provide might not accurately reflect attendance in a particular SRAE session, then asking facilitators to complete attendance logs after each lesson might be an easier way to assess dosage.

Table 1. Potential data sources for answering implementation evaluation research questions, by topic

Data source	Topics addressed in research question					
	Dosage	Fidelity	Quality	Context	Youth reactions	Staff reactions
Attendance records from partner sites or logs completed by facilitators	X					
Fidelity logs completed by facilitators	X	X				
Observations of program sessions	X	X	X			
Observations of facilitator trainings		X				
Interviews or focus groups with program or partner staff		X	X	X	X	X
Interviews or focus groups with youth			X		X	
Surveys of program staff		X		X		X
Surveys of youth			X	X	X	
Documents or news stories on policies or programs that might affect programming				X		