

Collecting High-Quality Data Through Observations

Organizations often want to collect data to learn about how their programs are operating and whether programs are achieving their goals. Observations can be a great way to understand how staff deliver a program and how participants experience the program. Organizations should take steps to ensure they conduct observations consistently to reduce potential sources of bias in the resulting data. The accompanying video introduced several strategies for collecting high-quality data through observations, which the following list summarizes. See Table 1 for key terms and their definitions and Table 2 for common factors included on observation forms.



Create or provide a standard form for observers to use, such as the form included with some curricula, to promote consistency and reduce observer bias. The observation form should identify the purpose of the observation, the factors observers should document, and criteria for assessing the factors.



Select and train those who will conduct observations. Ideally observers should be administrators or staff who are not directly involved with providing the programming in the classroom being observed. Training should explain the purpose of the observations, review the observation form, and define key factors under observation (see Table 2). Training should also include opportunities to practice using the observation form, perhaps by viewing a video recording of a facilitator providing the program.



Make sure observers are using the observation form consistently. You can do this by assessing inter-rater reliability at training by checking for consistency across different observers' ratings of the same factors. Inter-rater reliability for observations of the same classroom and facilitator can be calculated in several ways (see 'For more on conducting inter-rater reliability assessments' below). Offering multiple training sessions and monitoring the use of the observation form can help promote reliability among observers over time.

Table 1. Key terms

Term	Definition
Observer bias	Observers' preconceived notions about what they expect to find
Inter-rater reliability	Consistency across different observers' ratings of the same factors

Table 2. Common factors included on observation forms

Method	Description
Number of youth	How many youth are in the classroom
Classroom layout	How the classroom is organized (assess against plan if measuring fidelity)
Types and number of activities	The types of activities facilitators offer (lecture, group work, role-play) and how many of each type (assess against plan if measuring fidelity)
Timing of activities	How long each activity takes (assess against plan if measuring fidelity)
Content covered	What information is covered during class time
Clarity of instructions	How clear the directions the facilitator delivers to the youth are
Facilitator time management	How well the facilitator keeps track of the time during class
Facilitator classroom management	How well the facilitator supervises youth engagement and behavior
Youth participation	How much youth contribute, focus, and engage during class time
Quality of program delivery	How prepared, comfortable, connected, and enthusiastic the facilitator is

For more on collecting data through observations:

This tip sheet provides guidance on when and how to do observations as well as how to analyze and use observation data: <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/observation-tip-sheet-april-2020.pdf>

This brief provides an overview of observations as a data collection method for evaluation: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief16.pdf>

This website provides an example of an observation form (Note: This document will download when you click on or enter the link in your browser): https://ctl.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/documents/classroom_observation_checklist.docx

This slide deck provides information on observations for measurement for continued quality improvement (see slides 51 and 52): https://sraene.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/Measurement_in_CQI.pdf

For more on conducting inter-rater reliability assessments:

This video provides information on establishing inter-rater reliability for teacher observations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=uxuAtkxRie8>

About this series

This video series, and the accompanying tip sheets on understanding and collecting high-quality data, were created as part of the [Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation \(SRAENE\)](#). The series covers a range of data-related topics to help grantees understand the importance of high-quality data and provide guidance on how they can collect them in their program. Although some of the resources are drawn from topic areas that are not related to SRAE, the content on data is still relevant.

FYSB does not recommend any particular survey platform or data system that may be referenced in tip sheets. For more information or questions, contact the SRAENE team at SRAETA@mathematica-mpr.com.

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