

How to Review Data Collection Plans

Webinar Session Highlights (April 26, 2018)



This webinar was developed specifically for AmeriCorps state commission staff who are directly involved in assessing subgrantee data collection plans. (Note: Prior to the session, participants were encouraged to watch a previously recorded webinar, “[Building Effective Data Collection Plans](#),” as background information regarding the topic at hand.) Led by members of the AmeriCorps team, this webinar discussed data collection plan expectations, the review process, and key elements for developing data collection plans. The session also included a review of an example data collection plan and highlighted key, relevant CNCS resources.

Speakers:

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Data Collection Plan Expectations

Programmatic data collection and reporting are fundamental requirements associated with being an AmeriCorps grantee or subgrantee. Programs must have plans for both what data they will collect and how they will collect it, and plans should cover all data elements that are required by CNCS (e.g. performance measure outputs and outcomes, demographic data, qualitative and quantitative information for program assessment). Additionally, the data collection plan should be in place at the beginning of each program year so that data collection is effective and consistent.

The 2018 Notice of Funding Opportunity required all new applicants to submit a data collection plan as part of their application. This included a description of the applicant's data collection system, how said system is sufficient to collect high-quality performance measurement data, and how the applicant plans to use performance data to improve programming. Applicants that didn't have a data collection system at the time of application submission were required to describe the plan and timeline for developing a high-quality system.

Distinct from the pre-award grant resolution process, commission staff are expected to review and provide feedback on data collection plans submitted by new, competitive grantees, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that an effective data collection plan is in place by the start of the program year. This is not a formal approval process and does not require revisions in the eGrants application but is meant to be a starting point for ongoing discussions with subgrantees.

Data Collection Plan Review Process

The steps for the data collection plan review process are as follows:

- 1) Read the data collection plan submitted in the Evaluation Summary or Plan section of the application.
- 2) Use a Review Tool that follows the format of the data collection plan outline. Mark each component of the plan as satisfactory or needs further development, and provide any comments as needed to explain the rating.
- 3) Provide the completed Review Tool to the grantee and schedule a call to discuss your feedback.
- 4) Work with the grantee, through ongoing program management, to strengthen and implement their data collection plan during the program year.

Data Collection Plan Key Elements

The following should be included in a high-quality data collection plan:

- **Determine the data to be collected.** The basic buckets of data for consideration are:
 1. Performance measure outputs and outcomes from the approved application, including at least one aligned performance measure connected to the primary service activity;
 2. Demographic indicators required by the notice of funding opportunity, including the number of applicants for AmeriCorps positions and the number of episodic and ongoing volunteers recruited and/or supported by AmeriCorps members; and
 3. Other data that is connected to the program's theory of change, tells a story around program impact, and/or informs continuous improvement.
- **Determine the source of the data.** A data source is the person, group, or organization that has information to answer measurement questions. The source must follow the National Performance Measure instructions. There may be a variety of sources that provide appropriate, valid, and objective data, and grantees must determine the most appropriate sources for their programs.
- **Choose appropriate instruments and describe them in detail.** An output instrument should ensure an unduplicated count of data and track the dosage or amount of service provided. An outcome instrument should measure the type of change that you're assessing during pre- and post-measurement points.
- **Select the person or people responsible for data collection.** Data collectors may be program staff, AmeriCorps members, or volunteers. The individuals who are responsible for data collection should have access to the sources and instruments, be qualified or experienced in collecting programmatic data, and be objective when administering the instruments.
- **Create a data collection schedule.** The schedule, which should be widely communicated, will ensure that the program has the resources, instruments, and collectors in place to effectively collect program data. Schedules should include key points such as training and administering both a pilot test and program data collection and allot sufficient time to achieve a reasonable response rate and provide quality data for timely meaningful results.
- **Create a data storage plan.** All source documentation must be stored to ensure verifiability of reported data and secured to protect any sensitive information. Source documentation includes survey responses, attendance sheets, and any other completed instrument used by the program to collect data.
- **Implement training for data collectors.** All data collectors should be trained so that they understand the importance of the data, how the data will be used, how and when to use the instruments, and how to properly store data.
- **Pilot test the program data collection methods and instruments.** Consider pilot testing the data with a comparable setting and similar population to beneficiaries prior to the program start. The data from the pilot test will allow the program to determine if the collected data provides the most useful information and make changes before implementing methods and tools at the start of the program year.
- **Analyze the data.** Data analysis allows the grantee to assess the quality of its program, the effects of its intervention, and whether or not the program is on target to reach its goals. All results should be used to inform continuous program improvement.
- **Use data analysis for program improvement.** Using data for decision-making encourages a culture of learning. Grantees should explore where there are gaps in service so the program can extend its reach and use the collected and analyzed data to determine how to increase the program's effectiveness in achieving output and outcome goals. Additionally, the grantee may use the results from analysis to help build the evidence base for the program.

Resources

- [Building Effective Data Collection Plans Webinar](#)
- [Data Collection Plan Review Tool](#)
- [Performance Measurement Core Curriculum](#)
- [Evaluation Core Curriculum](#)
- [Other Performance Measurement Resources](#)
- [National Performance Measure Instructions](#)