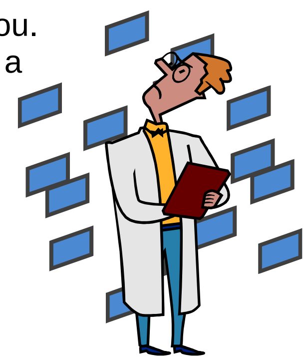
Eleven Proven Ways to Improve Data Collection

1. Get early buy-in from stakeholders.
Get buy-in from partner agencies or sites (and other important stakeholder) during performance measurement plan development. Check to ensure that what you want is something that they either already collect or are willing to collect and share with your project.

2. Start with success.
Begin your data collection efforts with those sites that can and will provide you the data you need in a timely manner.

3. <u>Identify</u> your helpers (data collectors).
Consider using your members or volunteers to help collect data for you. With a little training on how to use the instruments, they can often be a great source of information. They are there and see it all!



4. <u>Train</u> your helpers (data collectors).
This does not need to be complicated but should happen. Do data collectors know what to say? Where to turn in the information? How to respond to questions? How to protect confidentiality?

5. Identify appropriate <u>methods</u>.
Part of the problem with collecting data may be the method. Consider what method you are using to collect your data. Many sites and programs use surveys to collect data but this is not always the best way considering the populations served. Maybe an observation, a focus group with cookies or lunch, or short in person interviews would be more effective.

6. Identify appropriate <u>data source.</u>
One challenge is getting the information from the person or organization (data source) identified in your performance measurement plan. You may have an excellent survey for your clients but it is not feasible to get the survey to them, much less get it back. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to identify another data source for ease of collection (e.g. supervisors, teachers) or to increase the strength of the data (e.g. teacher perception of student progress instead of student self-report).

7. **Provide confidentiality.**
Obtaining data from respondents can often be difficult if they are concerned that their information will be shared with others, or that they will be identified in the report. Always inform respondents of the confidentiality guidelines (e.g. the survey is not anonymous but will not be shared with others), and ***abide by those guidelines***.

8. **Encourage respondents to give you the information you need.**
Keep instruments short, provide directions, inform folks about how you will use the information, offer incentives (food!), and use a captive audience. These are all ways to make sure respondents complete the instruments.

9. **Use low burden methods and processes.**
Integrate data collection with on-going processes. Do members/volunteers develop goal setting plans with teen mothers? Reviewing those plans at the end may provide data on the changes that teens were able to make as a result of the intervention. Do your schools already do an intake and exit form for tutored youth? Discussing the addition of a question or two may allow you to get some outcome data in a relatively easy way. Many agency partners already do intakes or exit forms. Build on those!

10. **Set a schedule**
Timing is a critical element of data collection. Be sensitive to the schedule of data collection at the sites. Coordinate your data collection efforts with the availability of the information you need. Trying to push people to give you data that is not ready, has not been collected or is no longer available only increases resistance.

11. **Pilot your process.**
You want to make sure that you can really get the data you need. For example, if you want crime statistics from the police station for a particular neighborhood, check in to make sure that they will be available when you need them and will be available for the population you are serving.