# Collecting data

This tool is part of an evaluation toolkit called Measuring What Matters. It includes information about how to complete this essential step of evaluation, including templates and a case study example of how a typical community organization — *HealthConnect* — might complete this step for their community health worker program.

How will you collect evaluation data?

Once you have decided on data sources, you will need to figure out your process for collecting data. You may not have to start from scratch—there are many questions and instruments that have been developed and tested by other organizations. Sometimes these will work without changes, and sometimes they need to be adapted to fit your evaluation or the community that you are working with. If existing resources will not work, you may need to design your own instrument. Here are a couple key considerations to keep in mind for data collection.
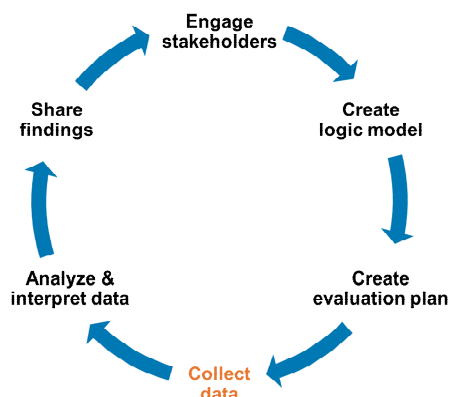
> ✓ Accurate. Is your data collection method measuring what you intend for it to measure, and is it doing so consistently?

- **Is your method reliable?** Reliability is the degree to which your method produces consistent results over many uses. For example, a reliable survey question would be one where each person thought the question was asking the same thing. Or a reliable observation tool would help any observers score or describe what they are seeing in the same way.

- **Is your method valid?** Validity is the degree to which your method actually measures what you intend it to measure. A simple example is that a ruler is a valid measuring device for length, but would not be valid for measuring weight. Often using more than one method for data collection can help you be more confident that you are measuring what you intend to measure.

> ✓ *Ethical*. Do you have a method to keep people's information confidential? If the data you are collecting will be sensitive or personal, your process will need to build in safeguards to protect people's privacy and make sure the data are secure.

- **Have you thought ahead about how you will manage the data once they are collected?** Knowing how the data will be aggregated and analyzed and whether you want to be able to make comparisons can influence how data collection instruments are designed. For example, do you want to be able to generate numbers or percentages and compare them over time?

When should I collect data?

When you collect data depends on what you want to learn and the data collection method you will be using. To answer some questions, you may only need to collect that data at one point during the program. To answer other questions, it may be useful to collect data before and after the program and then compare the results.

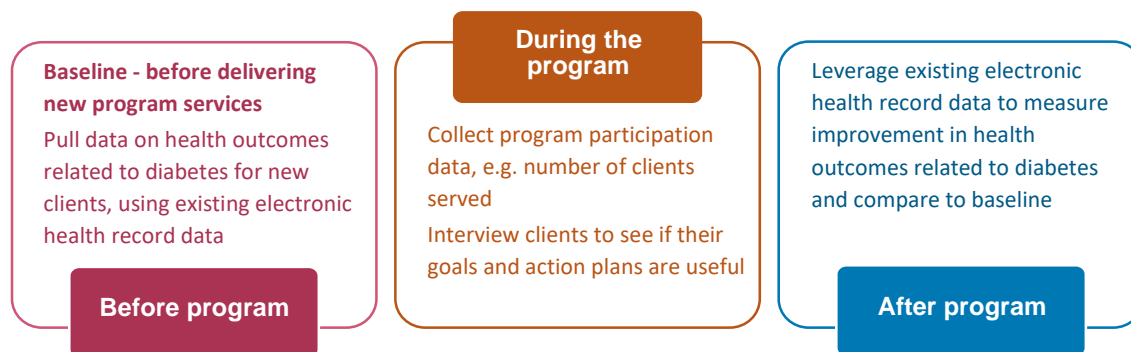## How do you design tools and conduct data collection?

This toolkit includes resources for the most commonly used methods that walk you through how to design the instrument, recruit participants, and collect the data with each method.

> ✓ *Equitable*. Consider the community that you will be working with as you design your data collection tools so that they are culturally responsive. Consider whether you will provide compensation for people that participate in your evaluation so that it is equitable.

Methods and tips for each of the following are included in separate sections in the Appendix:

Surveys   Interviews   Focus groups   Observation

The *Health Connect* program's evaluation plan included a variety of measures that required data collection before, during, and after the program. Some data were collected to answer questions about how the program was working. Other data were collected to understand the program's outcomes, such as improvement in health behaviors related to healthy eating and physical activity. The program team was also able to use existing electronic health record data for their long-term outcomes. Here are examples of their data collection at different time points:

Baseline - before delivering new program services
Pull data on health outcomes related to diabetes for new clients, using existing electronic health record data

Before program

During the program
Collect program participation data, e.g. number of clients served
Interview clients to see if their goals and action plans are useful

Leverage existing electronic health record data to measure improvement in health outcomes related to diabetes and compare to baseline

After program

The Center for Community Health and Evaluation designs and evaluates health-related programs and initiatives throughout the United States.

CCHE's *Measuring What Matters* curriculum is informed by the following resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: A Framework for Program Evaluation and A Practioner's Guide for Advancing Health Equity
- University of Wisconsin–Extension: Program Development and Evaluation
- Northwest Center for Public Health Practice: Data Collection for Program Evaluation [online course]