

STEP 4: DETERMINE HOW TO GET THE INFORMATION (COLLECT DATA)

Now that you have identified what data is needed to answer your questions and have identified potential secondary data sources, it is time to determine what data, if any, you need to collect from scratch. This is called **primary data**.

⇒ Step 4 has three activities, which are reflected in the *Step 4 Planning Worksheet: Data Collection Plan* (following page 5-35):

- 1.1 Identify What New Data Needs to be Collected
- 1.2 Select the Appropriate Data Collection Method(s)
- 1.3 Revisit Steps 1-3 to Ensure You're on Track

4.1 Identify What New Data Needs to be Collected

Once you have filled out the *Step 3 Worksheet* data, it will become clear what data you can access, and what data you cannot. Now is the time to decide what data you need to collect in order to answer your primary assessment questions. First circle each of the data sources listed in the third column in the Step 3 worksheet that your community partnership does not think can be accessed through any identified secondary data sources. If there are many sources of data, then you need to facilitate another consensus-building process with your partnership to prioritize which data is the most important to answer your stated questions.

Here are some helpful hints to consider when determining which data to collect:

- **Be flexible** – you may need to refine or modify your data decisions after deciding which methods are most feasible and appropriate for your community partnership to conduct. Go back and forth between activities 4.1 and 4.2, as they will ensure you make sound decisions everyone in the partnership feels are achievable.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel** – borrow data or data collection processes from local sources, similar community assessment efforts, or anything you can find on the Internet. The less you need to create from scratch, the more time and effort you can spend on other parts of the process.
- **Don't bite off more than you can chew** – collect less data well, rather than collecting lots of data poorly that won't end up being useful. It's more important to answer one assessment question well, than only answering parts of many assessment questions. Your results from answering the first question may help you find the funding, staff skills and data collection processes you need to answer another question later.

- **Be humble** – constantly ask for input and help from community partners and other community stakeholders about data collection. The more others are engaged, the easier it will be accomplish what you have set out to do.

4.2 Select the Appropriate Data Collection Method(s) (Given Time, Staffing, Resources and Skills)

The most difficult part about selecting the most appropriate data collection method is making sure that your partnership has the resources to perform that particular methodology. In *Appendix A: Methods* (page 5-1), you will find detailed descriptions and instructions on how to perform each of the following data collection methods:

1. Asset Mapping
2. Focus Groups
3. Key Informant Interviews
4. Surveys
5. Community Forums
6. Rapid Appraisal Techniques

Using the *Step 4 Planning Worksheet*, brainstorm with your partnership to develop your data collection plan. Here are some helpful questions for your partners to consider:

- Which of these methods has anyone used before?
- What were those data collection experiences like?
- What was challenging and what was successful about using these methods in the past?
- Which data collection methods were more successful than others?
- What are some difficulties you encountered when using these methods?
- Which method or methods do you think would best collect the types of data you have prioritized?
- Which method or methods do you think would best answer the assessment questions you have prioritized?
- What would be the potential benefits of using this particular method(s) for the assessment?
- What challenges do you imagine the partnership might face if you used this particular method(s) for the assessment?
- Do you think this partnership can collect data through this method(s), given the available staffing, skills, and funding? If not, what might be a better method to use?

- What community members would be the best to target with this method?
- Which of your prioritized types of data from Step 3 will each method specifically collect?
- Which of your primary assessment questions from Step 2 will this method specifically answer?
- What activities need to take place in order to perform this data collection method(s)? (see the *Methods Appendices* for details on conducting data collection methods)
- Which community partner or members will be responsible for carrying out each activity?
- What is the timeline or due date for each specified data collection activity?

Keep in mind that there are two different kinds of data you can collect, quantitative and qualitative. Depending on your partnership's level of data collection expertise, time frame, and level of funding or other resources, you may want to collect just quantitative data, just qualitative data, or a combination of both, in order to answer your assessment questions.

Quantitative data are usually measured and expressed in the form of numbers or percentages. This data can answer the who, what, when and where questions of an assessment.

Qualitative data is usually measured and expressed in the form of words, concepts, themes, or categories rather than numbers. Qualitative data is often used to gain a more in-depth understanding of a particular incident or phenomenon—they answer how or why something is occurring.

Here are some important distinctions between quantitative and qualitative data that may help you in your decision-making:

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measured and expressed in the form of numbers or statistics Also called numeric data Can answer the who, what, when and where of an issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measured and expressed in the form of words, stories or themes Also called anecdotal data Can answer the how or why Used to gain a more in-depth understanding of an issue
Data Collection Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary data Surveys Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observations Focus group Surveys Interviews
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can demonstrate cause and effect Can “represent” a community by capturing the perspectives of many respondents Usually easier to interpret 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Richer, more in-depth information about the topic being studied Can provide data from respondents in their own words Can collect new data and new ideas from respondents in a dynamic and unstructured way
Drawbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to provide rich, in-depth data Cannot collect new ideas or responses – only those thought of previously 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot demonstrate cause and effect Usually not able to “represent” a community Can be difficult to interpret

Note that surveys and interviews can collect quantitative or qualitative data, depending on whether the question is asked in a closed- or open-ended format.

- An example of a closed-ended question may be: How many times have you seen a doctor during the past six months? Answer choices: 0, 1-2, 3-4, 5 or more.
- An example of an open-ended question may be: What challenges, if any, have you faced when trying to see a doctor in the past six months?

In addition, multiple methods can be combined to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at one time. For example, focus group participants can be given a brief quantitative survey before or after the focus group, in addition to the qualitative discussion that would occur during the focus group.

We recommend that both kinds of data be collected, if possible, because they serve two very different and necessary functions when attempting to paint a complete picture of your community's health experience. Quantitative data can describe the size of a health problem and determine its associations with other issues, such as demographic factors or insurance coverage. Qualitative data helps give meaning and appropriate interpretation of the quantitative data, as well as answering "why" and "how".

The Data Collection Methods chart below outlines the methods discussed at length in *Appendix A: Data Collection Methods*, and provides some useful comparisons of advantages and disadvantages.

Once you have selected the appropriate data collection method or methods, you will want to complete the data collection plan included as the *Step 4 Planning Worksheet*. Some important issues you will want to consider for this data collection plan include:

1. What **types of data** (identified in step 3) will be collected with each data collection method?
2. How would you define the source of data for each data collection method more specifically? In other words, define your **target respondents**. If the source for a particular method is "community members", then how would you define community members more specifically? Will you target a specific gender, age, racial/ethnic group, clients of a specific service or program, members of a specific community group? These decisions are up to you and should be included in your data collection plan.
3. Which of your **assessment questions** will each method answer? This will ensure that the data you collect through each method are strategic to answering these questions.
4. What **specific activities** will need to be accomplished in order to best plan and perform these proposed data collection methods? These steps will be specific to your community partnership and the resources and timeline you have for this project, as well as the methods you have chosen. Some activities may include data collection tool development, data collector training, respondent recruitment, etc.
5. Determine who in your community partnership has the experience, interest and time to accomplish each activity.
6. Select a due date or timeline for each activity so that this planning worksheet can become an achievable Data Collection Plan.

Data Collection Methods Chart

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Asset Mapping An inventory of community health assets, such as available resources, services, facilities, community-based organizations and associations. Usually represented by geographically mapped data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on existing community assets • Can generate a lot of community participation • Mapping the inventory creates a visual depiction of existing and lacking assets • Data can be used to raise awareness about the availability of assets, develop or improve services and programs, or to apply for funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding the right maps can be difficult, and mapping software can be expensive and difficult to use • Some community assets will be difficult to map if they don't have a physical location • Needs community buy-in and collaboration to adequately inventory up-to-date community resources
<p>Focus Groups A series of structured discussions involving 8-12 people, selected to share their perceptions of a defined topic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible • Captures rich, in-depth data • Immediate results • Encourages and stimulates individuals to share more openly • Data can be combined with quantitative data to provide a complete picture about an issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be challenging to recruit participants • Need to schedule at least 2-3 focus groups to capture diversity • Difficult to generalize results to the larger population because of small numbers of participants • Difficult to compare results across groups
<p>Survey A survey conducted over the phone, in person or via mail with closed-ended or directed questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data can be collected from a lot of respondents easier than any other method • Can get a large enough sample that can be representative of the larger population • Findings can be generalized to the larger population • Can cover a lot of topics • Can easily compare different groups' data to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey instrument must be carefully constructed to avoid leading questions, and to make sure the appropriate responses are available • Response rates can be low for self-administered surveys, especially mailed ones • Response will be low if survey is too long
<p>Key Informant Survey A survey conducted over the phone, in person or via mail with short answers or other open-ended questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed and rich data can be gathered in a relatively easy and inexpensive way • Allows interviewer to establish rapport with the respondent • Provides an opportunity to build or strengthen relationships with important community informants and stakeholders • Can raise awareness, interest, and enthusiasm around an issue • Can contact informants to clarify issues as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting the "right" key informants may be difficult so they represent diverse backgrounds and viewpoints • May be challenging to reach and schedule interviews with busy and/or hard-to-reach respondents • Difficult to generalize results to the larger population unless interviewing many key informants

Data Collection Methods Chart

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Community Forums A series of public meetings focused on a defined topic. Forums are often moderated to ensure that important topics are covered and that time is efficiently allocated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can raise awareness and knowledge on an issue • Relatively easy and inexpensive to conduct • Allows for community and stakeholder participation in issue • Participants can identify new areas or topics not previously considered • Forums can help identify new leaders or stakeholders that may help in the planning and implementation of a project or initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be difficult to schedule a series of public meetings with the community members and other stakeholders you want to reach • Participants may not be representative of the larger population as those who attend may not reflect the entire community or target audiences • Participants come with their own expectations and agendas
<p>Direct Observation and Photography (Rapid Appraisal Methods) Observations and photography that can help to describe or visually depict community conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively easy and inexpensive • Data can be gathered quickly • Can create community input and participation • Provide descriptions and visual imagery that give meaning to quantitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to interpret and summarize photographs and observation notes • Can be difficult to represent the entire community experience

4.3 Revisit Steps 1-3 to Ensure You're on Track

Before you spend any time or resources collecting data, be sure your community assessment plan adheres to these helpful standards:

- **Feasible** – Will the assessment be practical, realistic, and achievable? Is it doable?
- **Useful** – Will the amount and type of information you collect meet the needs of those who intend to use it? Will this information help to address the community public health needs you identified?
- **Accurate** – Will the assessment methodologies collect information that accurately reflects reality?
- **Fair** – Will the assessment be conducted with awareness of the rights of the people involved?
- **Responsive** – Is the assessment guided by the community needs, defined problems, goals, objectives and assessment questions articulated by the partnership throughout the planning process?

If at any point it seems clear that any part of your assessment plan does not meet the above standards, it is important to recognize that now and go back and make

adjustments. It may seem difficult to go back through the whole or part of the above process, but it will be more difficult later if you have set unrealistic assessment objectives or committed to collect data that does not ultimately answer your primary questions.