

Best Practices 4 Data

# Hire Effectively for Data Roles

May 2024

## About the Series

The **BestPractices4Data** series focuses on sharing innovations and best practices for grantees, from grantees.

In 2023, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) convened listening sessions with grantees and government project officers to learn about strategies that grantees use to optimize data collection processes. Produced by the SAMHSA Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (**CFRI**) contract, the series of issue briefs aims to improve efficiency in the use of grant funds by providing opportunities for grantees to learn from each other. The briefs identify best practices that help reduce costs associated with resource-intensive trial and error attempts typical of new grantees who are trying to figure out the best ways to collect data.

All SAMHSA grantees are required to collect data as a condition of their funding. Grantees sometimes refer to these as Government Performance Results Act (GPRA), National Outcome Measures (NOMs), client-level data, participant-level data, program-level data, or progress reports. The **BestPractices4Data** series brings together innovative and best practices that grantees use to address the most common and complex challenges associated with grant-required data collection activities.

Grantees can determine their data collection requirements by reading their grant's Notice of Award (NOA).

The behavioral health workforce shortage and budgetary constraints can make data collection difficult for many grantees. Service providers and administrative staff often do not have time for data collection, given their other responsibilities. Further, some grantees find it difficult to attract, hire, and retain evaluators and data collection staff. Below are some grantee best practices for hiring for data roles.

## Best Practices



Define job requirements for data roles



Use structured interviews to assess candidates



Craft an effective job announcement to attract the best candidates



Embrace academic partnerships



Retain data staff over time

This issue brief considers the common challenges identified by SAMHSA grantees. It highlights innovative and practical ways that grantees address these challenges.

## Define Job Requirements

Grantees have found that an important first step in identifying evaluator or data collection staff is to draft a job announcement that clearly defines your needs. The job announcement should also be clear about how the individual will fit within the larger organization.

Some grantees struggle to distinguish between evaluator and data collector roles.



**Evaluators** help guide grantees with overall data strategy and protocols. They are attentive to data quality and analyze data to meet the needs of the grantees. In some programs, evaluators collect data and report the data into SAMHSA's Performance and Accountability Reporting System (SPARS).



**Data collectors**, sometimes referred to as interviewers, work directly with individuals receiving services or service provider staff to gather data. They implement the data strategy and protocols.

Since there may be overlaps in these positions, grantees should think carefully about their organization's capacity, workflow, and other obligations when structuring the titles and responsibilities of their data workforces.

## Use Structured Interviews to Assess Candidates

Structured interviews are designed to measure candidates' job-related competencies by systematically asking about their past experiences and expertise and what the candidate would do in hypothetical situations. Structured interviews help ensure candidates have equal opportunities to provide information and are assessed consistently.

Strong structured interview questions are:

- Reflective of the job
- Open-ended
- Clear and concise
- Free of jargon
- Written with superlative adjectives (e.g., ask for the most, last, worst, least, or best example or experience that helps demonstrate competency).

## Components of an Effective Job Announcement



### Grantee organization

Highlight the mission and purpose of the grant program and the grantee organization



### Candidate's fit within the organization

Write a few sentences that directly address how the candidate will fit within the organization



### Responsibilities

Outline the specific tasks and deliverables associated with the job and the required hours per day or week



### Job qualifications

Include experience, education, and skills required to perform the job; include the salary range

## Embrace Academic Partnerships

Academic partnerships can help address the challenge of finding knowledgeable evaluation and data collection staff. Nearby colleges and universities, or other nonprofit community partners, may have faculty and students who are eager to engage in behavioral health care evaluations. Some SAMHSA grantees have had success engaging with academic faculty who develop the evaluation framework and protocols and use the opportunity to train students as data collectors.

### Steps for Establishing Partnerships with Academic Institutions



- 1** Identify local colleges or universities that offer programs related to health care, public health, or other topics relevant to your grant program.



- 2** Reach out to academic faculty members or departmental leadership within the relevant programs to express your interest in collaboration.



- 3** Clearly outline the goals, objectives, and expected outcomes of the collaboration. Describe the benefit of the collaboration from the college's or university's perspective.



- 4** Be clear about the grantee data requirements and which activities are expected to be completed by each party.



- 5** Determine the duration of the partnership (e.g., over a semester, during the summer, 6 months, etc.), number of hours, and payment, as applicable.

## Retain Employees

Many SAMHSA grantees report high staff turnover among evaluators and data collection staff. General workforce shortages and budgeting challenges have made it difficult for grantees to retain their trained evaluation staff. SAMHSA grantees use the following best practices to retain staff over time.

- Orient staff to the overall goals of the program or organization and their role in helping achieve those goals
- Recognize and reward excellent staff performance
- Introduce service providers and administrative staff to the evaluation staff as part of the “team”
- Always provide orientation for new evaluators and data collectors
- Ensure data collectors are trauma-informed, culturally respectful, and know how to tell when an individual is experiencing a crisis
- Invest in ongoing training to build staff expertise and skills
- Check in regularly with evaluators and data collectors
- Keep an organized record of and consistently use training materials



## Additional Resources

[SAMHSA’s Addressing Burnout in the Behavioral Health Workforce through Organizational Strategies](#)

[SAMHSA Center for Financing Reform & Innovation \(CFRI\)](#)

[SAMHSA Grants](#)

### Best Practices Spotlight

## Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Grantee Strategies for Hiring and Retaining Staff\*

92%

Raise salaries or offer bonuses

86%

Engage in staff wellbeing efforts or revamp employee benefits

62%

Partner with clinical training programs (e.g., at colleges or universities) to alleviate the burden of evaluation and data collection

59%

Revise job descriptions to allow staff to practice at the top of their license

\* 2022-CCBHC-Impact-Report.pdf (thenationalcouncil.org)