Best Practices **4** Data

Establish Data Protocols to Optimize Data Collection

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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).

Collecting, managing, and reporting grant-required data is often a daunting task for grantees. Grantees note that data reporting errors occur, that tracking when clients are due for follow up surveys can be difficult, and that clients feel overwhelmed by the length of the assessments. Below are some grantee best practices for optimizing data management.

Best Practices

Consider key questions regarding data access, protection, collection, and verification

Establish a data protocol

Create a data infrastructure

Designate an evaluation lead

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

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Create a Data Protocol

Data protocols are documents that explicitly outline the rules and processes a grantee will use to ensure valid, high-quality, and consistent data collection.

Grantees use a variety of methods to ensure that their grant data collection is accurate and timely. For example, most grantees agree it is vital that administrative and service provider staff are aware of the grant data collection requirements and understand the value of the data. Other grantees have developed training materials to help staff understand the data processes, expectations, and rules of data collection. Some grantees designate an evaluation lead who is responsible for all aspects of data collection and is knowledgeable about the SAMHSA requirements and data reporting.

These types of practices are often summarized in a data protocol so that everyone within the organization can access and implement the processes uniformly. Below are steps capturing the best practices that SAMHSA grantees use to meet SAMHSA grant data reporting requirements.

Steps to Developing a Data Protocol

1 CONSIDER KEY QUESTIONS

- Who will have access to the data?
- How will data be protected?
- How will data be securely collected and stored?
- Who will be collecting the data?
- Are there additional programmatic questions that would be useful to ask clients in addition to the grant-required questions?
- Who will enter and review the data to ensure accuracy?

2 ESTABLISH A DATA PROTOCOL

- Make decisions about data processes prior to collection
- Align programmatic data collection with grant-required data collection
- Create a process for how follow-up interviews with clients will be conducted
- Pre-fill administrative parts of the grant-required data tool using information that is collected as part of the organization's routine data collection efforts
- Build grant-required data collection and reporting into broader work routines (ex: conduct interview during appointments)
- Consider how patient data will be kept confidential and secure; consider using an Institutional Review Board to ensure data safety procedures are appropriate

3 DESIGNATE A DATA LEAD

- Identify someone within the grantee organization to become an expert in data collection processes, SAMHSA's Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS), and grant requirements. Some example tasks include:
  – Understand policies and processes for data collection, entry, and reporting
- – Train others to collect and report data
- – Run analyses
- – Monitor internal tracking system to ensure follow-up interviews happen on time

Best Practices Spotlight

"Data collection started when we received our grant, but it was a new task that was not a part of our routine practice. We all tried to contribute and do what we could to meet the grant requirements, but it soon became chaotic. To remedy the situation, our outpatient services director asked everyone to write out their data related tasks. These notes, along with the data documentation from SAMHSA were organized into a protocol that now guides our data collection."

– SAMHSA Grantee

Additional Resources

Federal Data Strategy's Data Governance Playbook

National Institutes of Health's Data Management and Sharing Policy

National Institutes of Health's Writing a Data Management & Sharing Plan

SAMHSA Center for Financing Reform & Innovation (CFRI)