

## Focusing Your Evaluation Design

Often, at the beginning of an evaluation, people jump right to thinking about how to collect data (e.g., “Let’s do a survey!”) before figuring out what data they’ll need to answer their evaluation questions. The following tasks can help you design the right evaluation for your prevention initiative:

- **Clarify your purpose.** For example, do you want to find out if your interventions reached your focus population, or how well they worked to bring about change? Your purpose should be dictated by your stakeholders’ needs, including funding requirements, and guide all decisions that follow.
- **Develop your questions.** Once you’re clear on your purpose, you’ll need to develop evaluation questions that are specific to what you want to learn. Some questions can help you learn about the implementation of an intervention while others can help you learn about its outcomes.
- **Select the right design.** There are different ways to design, or structure, an evaluation. Some questions are best answered by gathering data from intervention participants and practitioners throughout implementation. Other questions are best answered by gathering data before and after an intervention, and/or from non-participants as well as participants. This latter approach allows for helpful comparisons and a better understanding of an intervention’s effects.
- **Choose appropriate methods.** There are different ways to gather the data you need. Qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) produce data that are usually expressed in words. They let you explore an issue or population in-depth by answering questions such as Why or why not? and What does that mean? Quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, checklists) produce data that are usually expressed in numbers. They allow you to draw general conclusions about an issue or population by answering questions such as How much? How many? and How often? Which methods you select will depend on what you want to learn, your budget and timeline, and what’s most appropriate for your focus population.

*From the Prevention Solutions@EDC online course: [What Is the SPF? An Introduction to SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework.](#)*