

## Gathering Credible Evidence and Justifying Conclusions

How you gather data will determine how well you can answer your evaluation questions—and whether your findings will be taken seriously by others. The following are some ways to increase the credibility of your evaluation:

- **Use quality tools and procedures.** This means using data collection tools and procedures that are both valid and reliable. A valid tool measures what it's supposed to measure. A reliable tool produces consistent results each time you use it. Selected tools and procedures should also be culturally appropriate.
- **Take a mixed-methods approach** (i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods). This will allow you to examine your initiative from diverse perspectives, answer your evaluation questions more fully, and feel more confident in your findings.
- **Provide training and support.** Make sure that everyone involved in collecting and analyzing data gets the training and support they need to do it well. o Gather enough data: Gather enough data from different sources to be able to draw conclusions with confidence—without going beyond your budget or missing important deadlines.
- **Manage the process.** It's important to take a systematic approach to storing and analyzing these data, as well as to developing and acting on your findings.

Once you have your evaluation data collected, you will need to analyze, synthesize, and interpret it.

- **Analyze.** This involves systematically examining each data source to determine key findings. Whenever possible, engage multiple reviewers in the data analysis process and make sure that everyone follows the same protocol.

- **Synthesize.** The next step is to compare and connect your results across data sources. By combining information from different data sources, you can detect areas of overlap and consistency—and identify new questions to explore when findings are inconsistent.
- **Interpret.** Finally, draw conclusions based on a careful examination of all your data. What positive or negative outcomes do your data reveal? Can you attribute these outcomes to the intervention—or are other explanations possible? What decisions or actions do you recommend based on your conclusions?

When analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting evaluation data, it is important to involve the right people. These include individuals with research expertise, intervention staff, focus population members, and other prevention stakeholders who can help increase the accuracy and cultural relevance of evaluation findings.

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