Tips for Managing Data

Whether you've gathered a lot of data or a little, found it online or in person, data management is key. Data management can help you keep track of all the data you gather. It involves the following tasks:

- Storing the data appropriately
- Recording the data
- Understanding the data quality

Data Storage

Data management begins with appropriate data storage. Data storage involves more than sorting data into alphabetized files. It means making sure that the data are stored securely and that you have enough space to store all the data you've compiled.

- **Secure storage.** Data should be stored securely, so that it can't be accessed by anyone else. This is especially important for data that contains confidential information, which must be stored in accordance with federal and state guidelines for protecting privacy. If you are unfamiliar with these guidelines, consult an evaluator or your technical assistance provider.

- **Adequate storage space.** Data files can be very large, so it's important to set aside adequate storage space, in your office or on your computer, to hold these files. Also back up electronic files regularly, so that you can access them even if you experience computer problems. For help preparing for data storage, consult an evaluator or your technical assistance provider.

Recording the Data

Maintaining a comprehensive inventory of your data can help you see what you have, what you're missing, and who to talk to if questions arise. Also, when it comes time to evaluate your prevention efforts, having a good record of the data reports you have compiled will help you decide which indicators to track and which data you will need to revisit to see if any changes have occurred. Some people like to use a chart to track the

data they compile. Others prefer an excel spreadsheet. Whichever you use, here are some details you should record for each piece of data you collect:

- **Type of Report/Record.** This describes what the data are (e.g., a self-reported survey on youth risk behaviors, number and percent of injuries that are alcohol-related).

- **Source of the Data.** This is the name of the specific report, record, and/or data set, and also the agency or website where it came from (e.g., student survey from the local high school).

- **Name of Contact.** This is the name and contact information of the person who gave you the data and the person who authorized its release, if it was someone different.

- **Format.** This identifies the form of data you received (e.g., electronic excel file, case record, video). With electronic files, in particular, you may also want to note additional information about how the data are defined (e.g., Column Two displays lifetime drinking rates for 9th graders, Column Three displays rates for 11th graders).

Understanding the Data Quality

Much of the data you receive will be in the form of summary reports. While these reports are based on the raw data collected by an agency or organization, they should not be accepted at face value. It's important to understand what these reports show and don't show in order to determine if they can answer your assessment questions. For example, don't assume hospital data on age and race is correct. When patients provide this information directly, it is likely to be accurate. But when hospital staff members are responsible for writing down this information they may guess at the answers—and often guess wrong. In this situation, how the data were collected is important to its quality.

To determine data quality, you will want to know:

- Who collected the data and who they collected it from
- When the data were collected
- What data were collected

- How the data were collected

The best place to go for this information is back to your data keepers. At this point, it's helpful to enlist the help of an evaluator or someone with data experience (e.g., your technical assistance provider). He or she can help you identify and ask the right questions to get the answers you need.

From the Prevention Solutions@EDC online course: [Go Get It! Finding Existing Data to Inform Your Prevention Efforts](#).