# Tips for Analyzing Assessment Data

Here are some things to keep in mind when analyzing your data:

- **Use information from several data sources.** Using multiple data sources can help you recognize complementary or confirming data, as well as inaccurate information. Think of it this way: If you were having severe stomach pains, wouldn't you want a clinical exam and an MRI before having your appendix removed?

- **Involve others.** This includes individuals with direct data experience, as well as those who know, work with, and understand the people behind the data. Community members can provide valuable perspectives on what the data show, and can help to ensure that nothing is misinterpreted

- **Be critical.** If information seems illogical or inconsistent, go back to the data source and get clarification. For example, if hospital admissions data on prescription drug overdoses show that the rated doubled this year compared to last, find out why. Rates may have in fact doubled, but the hospital might also have changed the way the data were counted.

- **Determine any additional data you need.** When reviewing the data you receive, ask yourself if it answers your assessment questions and/or if it contains surprises or conflicting information that might require additional data from other sources.

Keep in mind that interpreting data can be complicated, so don't hesitate to get help from an evaluator. If that's not possible, seek out epidemiologists or statisticians working in local public health departments or universities. Graduate students can also be a very helpful and cost-effective resource.