



CRITICAL MASS:

DATA COLLECTION

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

This good practice guide has been designed for use by organisations or projects who would like to improve their data collection practices. It contains some practical suggestions about what you can do on different levels within the organisation.

There are various ways to improve data collection in your project. Ideally, for the most effective change to take place, everyone should be involved. However, there are different things that you can implement on different levels. We'll have a look at where and how you can start making the changes:



AS AN ORGANISATION...

TRAINING:

- Implement client data collection and analysis training as part of the induction process for all staff and volunteers.
- Ensure that any training undertaken on data analysis, Excel or client recording systems is cascaded to other staff wherever possible.

PRODUCE SIMPLE GUIDELINES:

- For all staff on how to collect, input, and then use information.
- Produced a reminder sheet to have by staff's computers offering step by step guidance.

USE YOUR DATA

- Use pre- and post-evaluation methods to see whether certain programmes/activities have an impact on certain outcomes. For example, you could check whether doing a back to work course increases readiness for employment by looking at engagement in work like activities/preparing CV/increased motivation to find work.
- Show the positive changes that your service is achieving by comparing your data to other services (e.g. by comparing it with data from SNAP [\(add link\)](#)).

AS A TEAM...

Reviewing your data as a team is extremely important, as each team within the organisation would have different data needs.

DISCUSS YOUR DATA:

- Insert a standing item on team meeting agendas to share thoughts on additional data that needs to be collected, current practices and any challenges that arise.
- Plan for future proposals by discussing what relevant information needs to be collected, how to gather such data and how to analyse it.
- Update each other on interesting findings that you have noticed when inputting the data, and possible areas of research.
- Nominate a member of staff with an interest in data as a data champion who trains other staff to implement these guidelines (and reflect this in the individual's work plan/objectives)

UPDATE YOUR FIELDS:

- Ensure that the data collection form you use responds to any new client groups you may see. If other information is being collected on a regular basis, create a new question in your form, and new data field in your data inputting system

AS INDIVIDUALS...

MANAGERS - EMBED THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA COLLECTION WITH FRONTLINE STAFF

Frontline staff may have difficulty seeing how data collection feeds into support work. The data collection undertaken by frontline staff is of fundamental importance to the support process, and the organisation's effectiveness, planning and fundraising ability. Ensure frontline staff have an understanding of the organisation's data flow and impact, and their important role in this process. Sometimes 'data' can be an alienating word, so use 'information' and your staff may be able to engage with the concepts more easily.

FRONTLINE STAFF - REMEMBER THAT THE DATA YOU COLLECT WILL HELP YOUR CLIENTS

Data collection feeds into support work by helping the organisation to analyse who clients are and what happens for them. This means the organisation can develop more targeted services to meet the needs of the client group. Data collection also feeds into funding, in finding out what people need and providing evidence to funders. Without funding there is no service and there is no support for clients. Frontline data collection also feeds into the bigger picture of homelessness – statistics on client backgrounds, support needs and outcomes are used to inform all levels of government, and the homelessness sector overall. You directly influence the development of government policy on homelessness through the quality and detail of the information you record in working with clients. In filling in forms and files correctly, you are telling politicians what it is to be homeless.

For more help and support, please go to: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/critical-mass>.

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