

Tips for Assessing Measures

These tips can be used when assessing or re-assessing a potential measure, and as a guideline for things to consider when adapting, modifying, or developing a measure.

Matching Measures to Evaluation Needs

Is it the “right tool for the job”?

Does the measure answer the evaluation question? Are you looking at an outcome about skills, knowledge, attitude, etc. – if so, then how well does the construct the measure has been developed for match the construct you want to address in your evaluation question? If the primary intention is to identify program improvements, will the measure yield helpful information? If the evaluation tool is a broad measure covering a number of constructs, does it address all outcomes you are interested in? Does it address some that you do not need? (For example, the ERS forms used by many Nutrition Programs measure multiple outcomes such as knowledge, skill and behavior.)

Is it appropriate for the Program Lifecycle?

Does the measure fit the appropriate stage of the program and evaluation lifecycles? Although this is not a hard and fast rule, newer programs tend to be well served by more unstructured and open-ended measurement types like observational methods, field notes, success stories, checklists, and so on. Programs that are further along in their lifecycle with some evidence already established tend to call for more quantitative testing, formal performance assessments and checklists, attitude scales, etc.

Will it “work” for the sample group?

Consider the literacy, age level, cultural background, and other special characteristics of your target audience.

Will it “fit” into the Program setting?

Think about the length of contact time with participants, venue (outdoors vs. indoors), and other factors that may influence how effectively and consistently the measure can be administered.

Will the results “speak” to the key stakeholder(s)?

Consider the stakeholders who will be reviewing your results and the data you gather. Stakeholders can have different preferences or constraints, and may put more weight on some kinds of evaluations than others. In some cases you may want only qualitative or quantitative data, or you may want a mixture. Be sure that your measure(s) will meet the needs of your

audience(s). In many cases, the strength of the research base for the measure could be very helpful in making your results credible and compelling to funding agencies, etc.

Is it feasible?

There's no point in listing a measure in an evaluation plan if it is simply not realistic that program staff will be able to find it, afford it, modify it appropriately, test it, use it, analyze it, and/or report on it. Will staff have the technical skills and time available to use this measure well?

Strategic Value

If time and resources are limited then efforts should be focused on the opportunities that have the highest "payoff". Consulting with stakeholders or advisory groups is recommended in order to be sure that the choice is made well.

Quality of the Measure

This is the "bird in the hand vs. two in the bush" decision. A program may have a choice between using what is on hand already (which may be ready to go, and may even have data from past years giving evaluators the opportunity to compare results), or trying to find a "better" existing measure. A "better" measure in this case might mean one that has been tested in careful studies for validity and reliability, has the credibility of having been used in additional research papers, and for which large-scale study results are available to which results can be compared. (What constitutes good values to look for may depend on other aspects of your evaluation plan.)

Note: If using established or named measures, be sure that they are properly referenced. Measures developed and field tested by others should be properly cited. If you have modified or adapted an established measure in some way, be sure to describe these changes and explain the reason(s) for them.

Finally, remember that decisions about measures don't occur in a vacuum – they are related to sampling, design and analysis issues, that is, they will both affect and be affected by these other topics.