Part 4: Tips for Collecting, Interpreting, and Making Sense of Evaluation Data

Tips for getting the most out of evaluation data, from how and how often to collect, to sharing learnings within and beyond the project team.

Collecting evaluation data

- **Use examples in this guide to get a head start.** The Enhancing Linkage TA initiative provides examples in this module to give you a head start on designing evaluation activities. Be sure to customize them to the goals and needs of your project.

- **Use multiple methods to strengthen your evaluation approach.** For example, to form a richer understanding of project challenges and achievements, plan to collect quantitative data (i.e., data that tells you HOW MUCH something is happening, using counts, percentages, and statistics) and qualitative data (i.e., data that tells you WHY something is or is not happening, using interview or focus group techniques to gather narrative information).

- **Keep data collection simple.** Where possible, instead of creating new tools, carry out evaluation steps using existing materials like logic models or process flow diagrams, progress reports and meeting notes, or data reports required by an existing grant.

Frequency of evaluation data collection and analysis

- **At minimum, collect evaluation data at the beginning and end of the project.** Evaluations typically compare data from before project work begins ('baseline') to data collected after a set period of implementation ('follow up') to understand whether the project was able to influence the intended variable(s). If possible, and as appropriate for the types of data your project uses, collect additional rounds of data (for example, quarterly process data) to test progress on key indicators as well.

- **Fit your data collection strategy within existing project resources.** Collecting data and translating it into action and learning requires project resources (staff, time, and budget). It is important to limit data collection to the most necessary elements and frequency to meet evaluation plan goals.

- **Analyze evaluation data on time.** To maximize utility for learning and performance improvement, translate evaluation data into findings to share with the project team and stakeholders according to an expected schedule.

HIV/AIDS Bureau Improving Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Outcomes Using a Tiered Technical Systems Approach to HIV/STI Linkages - Implementation Guide - Evaluation Module - *Part 4: Tips for Collecting, Interpreting, and Making Sense of Evaluation Data*
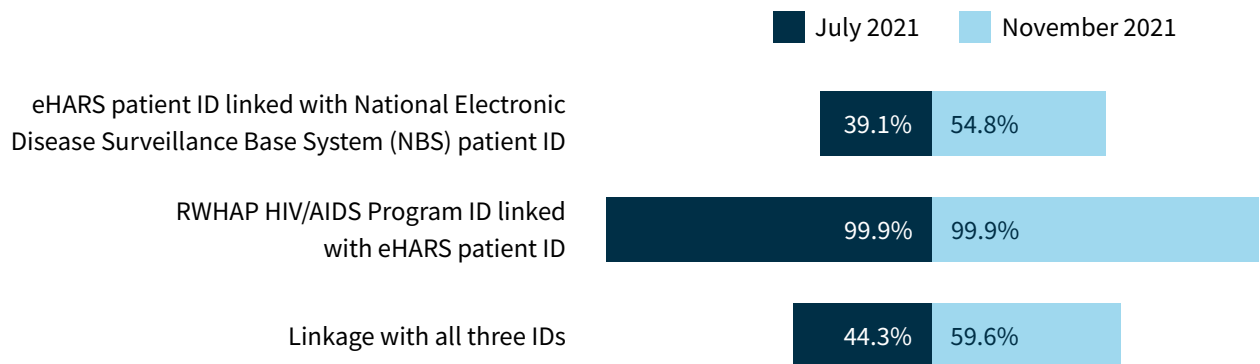
1

Using your findings for quality improvement

Quality improvement (QI) consists of systematic and continuous actions that lead to measurable improvement in health care services and the health status of targeted patient groups (HRSA, 2011)

- **Review evaluation data during team meetings.** Data should inform QI plan-do-study-act cycles. Use project team meetings or regular project communication channels (like Microsoft Teams) to share and review new data or evaluation findings with project team members who understand the work and can help interpret them. PowerPoint slides are a simple format for summarizing key points, sharing data trends, and documenting insights. See an example of project data from the Enhancing Linkage evaluation below showing quarterly progress.

Using your findings for Quality Improvement

July 2021   **November 2021**

Metric	July 2021	November 2021
eHARS patient ID linked with National Electronic Disease Surveillance Base System (NBS) patient ID	39.1%	54.8%
RWHAP HIV/AIDS Program ID linked with eHARS patient ID	99.9%	99.9%
Linkage with all three IDs	44.3%	59.6%

Reviewing evaluation results and determining next steps

- **Review evaluation data with stakeholders on a regular basis.** Generate a data report and/or summarize observations or emerging themes from implementation and share these with stakeholders to keep them updated and to receive helpful input. A review meeting or an email can be used to share new information. Spark thinking about what the data means and how to translate it into action by asking key questions and making space for a discussion. Clarify and gain consensus on next steps for implementation based on the data.

Sustaining evaluation activities

- **Share successes and challenges of your data linkage project broadly.** For example, conference presentations and published reports allow the learnings from your project to inspire and inform other organizations to take on similar work. Continue sharing successes and challenges internally as well to gain and maintain buy-in from agency leadership.

- **Keep up the momentum.** Data linkage projects can unfold over a long time-horizon, and often uncover opportunities for new data linkages along the way that will improve other programs and services. For this reason, it makes sense to lay a strong foundation so evaluation practice and capacity can grow with a growing project. Start evaluation work early by developing strong tools and processes and keep the cycle of learning moving forward. As projects continue, so should the virtuous cycle of evaluation and learning.

HIV/AIDS Bureau Improving Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Outcomes Using a Tiered Technical Systems Approach to HIV/STI Linkages - Implementation Guide - Evaluation Module - *Part 4: Tips for Collecting, Interpreting, and Making Sense of Evaluation Data*

2