

Planning Your Assessment

Designing a good assessment is an art, and doing it well requires some reflection before you begin. This document is designed to be a guide for the very first step of assessment and offers three key questions to think about as you get started.

1. What is the **purpose** of my assessment?

- The purpose of conducting assessment is not merely answering “what do I *want* to know?” but is about having a well-defined goal for your data once you’ve gathered it. When you decide to assess a program or service, ask yourself “What will I do with the information I’ve collected? What is my plan for using the results?”
- Assessment is often conducted with no clear end use in mind, and thus little happens with the data. This lack of action leads to an organizational culture that is skeptical, resistant, or disinterested in assessment. Make sure that you have a good reason to collect information, and start by having a concrete plan for using your findings.
- The best assessments are tied to program, department, division, and university goals. When considering the purpose of your assessment, consider how your project will help you better meet these goals and outcomes.

2. What **information** will be most useful?

- Figure out what answers you need before you begin. This may be the most important part of writing good questions! There is information that is “need to know” and there is information that is “nice to know.” An effective assessment will focus on collecting the “need to know” information while including “nice to know” questions strategically and sparingly.
- What data are available to you already? Before you decide to collect new information, think about what you already have that may answer your questions. There may be data being collected within your department (e.g. sign in sheets) or data that exists in other offices (like a research office on campus). Using existing data will save time and resources.

3. How much is **enough**?

- Attempt to be economical by maximizing the usefulness of the answers you will receive while asking the fewest questions possible. As tempting as it may be to collect as much data as you can through a single assessment, this may not be an effective or efficient strategy for meeting your particular assessment goals.
- Determine in advance at what point you will stop collecting new data. This may mean a timeline set up for a survey, or a limit to how many interviews you will complete.

For more information, check out the following documents located at: www.sairo.ucla.edu/AssessmentSupport.html

- Worksheet for Assessment Planning
- Survey Planning Checklist
- Interview Planning Checklist
- Writing Effective Survey Questions
- Asking Effective Qualitative Questions
- Links to Additional Resources