

COLLECTING DATA TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The Value of Data

Data are an important tool in building an organization's capacity to serve all victims of trafficking. Data can help individuals assess organizational needs, identify areas for improvement, inform program strategies, and measure change over time. Organizations can use data to support protocols and programs, inform decision making, and drive action to serve victims of human trafficking.

Finding Human Trafficking Data

Human trafficking is often "hidden in plain sight." As a result, comprehensive human trafficking data can be difficult to obtain. Gathering data from multiple sources may provide a more accurate picture of vulnerable populations and inform an organization on how to better identify and serve trafficking victims in the community.

Keep in mind, different organizations collect human trafficking data differently, using a variety of definitions, populations, and measurements. These data sources can be useful when trying to understand the prevalence of human trafficking in a community—

- [Local law enforcement and prosecution data](#) - Inform the demographics, contributing factors, and prevalence of identified human trafficking. No one source of crime data can provide a complete picture of human trafficking, which is a complex, underreported, and under prosecuted crime.
- [Local victim service provider data](#) - Show the demographics and prevalence of victims, even if they have not been identified by law enforcement.
- [Local hospitals, shelters, and legal offices](#) - Provide context to discover identified accounts of trafficking, demographic data on the victim, and relationships to the perpetrator.

- **Human trafficking taskforces and coalitions** - Offer context to the service provider infrastructure and partnership availability across the state.
- **Statewide reports** (e.g., Polaris, Health and Human Services) - Present high-level data on demographics, trends over time, and sources of information from a state perspective.
- **Self-reported, interview data** - Provide a survivor perspective to inform service delivery and support victim identification.

Developing a Data Collection Plan

Determining how data will be used gives the data collection process a clear direction and goal. A data collection plan is a roadmap for what and how data should be collected. A well thought out data collection plan will help ensure the data collected is useful for its intended goals. Steps to consider when writing a data collection plan include—

- **Determine the goal of measurement** (e.g., implementation, sustainability, or program services).
- **Identify questions** needing answers to reach the goal(s).
- **Determine if quantitative or qualitative data needs** to be collected.
- **Identify sources** to obtain the needed data.
- **Specify a mechanism or approach** to collect the data (e.g., template, survey, or focus group).
- **Begin with a baseline measure** and collect data at periodic intervals.

Data Collection Practices

Data collection practices establish a consistent process, help set priorities of an organization, and may improve the safety of the data. Following are some suggestions to consider when collecting data.

- **Define data governance** for use, access to, and management of data.
- **Establish protocol** for safeguarding sensitive data.
- **Understand laws or policies** around the data being collected.
- **Identify and train** a data manager.
- **Develop a data collection plan**, setting data goals and measurement priorities.
- **Train data collectors** and test data collection mechanism.
- **Acknowledge and record potential limitations or biases** within the data or collection process.
- **Establish a data tracking system.**

Qualities of Good Data

The quality of the data is an important as the collection of the data. For data to assist in guiding programs and strategies, there are a few qualities to keep in mind.

- **Valid** – Does the data measure what we believe it measures?
- **Accurate** – Does the data reflect the correct information?
- **Relevant** – Is the data applicable and necessary for the study?
- **Reliable** – Would the data be consistent if someone else collected it?
- **Impartial** – Is the data collected in a transparent way acknowledging and considering potential biases?
- **Accessible** – How accessible is the data to stakeholders? What considerations need to be taken when dealing with victim data?

Summary

Data inform and support decision-making for an organization. Identifying data from multiple sources, outlining a collection plan, following proper data collection practices, and focusing on good quality data are the foundation for collecting data. Understanding data can help an organization make data-informed decisions as they develop services for all victims of human trafficking.

Additional Resources

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) [Understanding Human Trafficking Training Series - Module 5: Understanding the Scope of the Issue](#)

[OVC-Funded Services and Taskforces](#)

[The Human Trafficking Capacity Building Center](#)