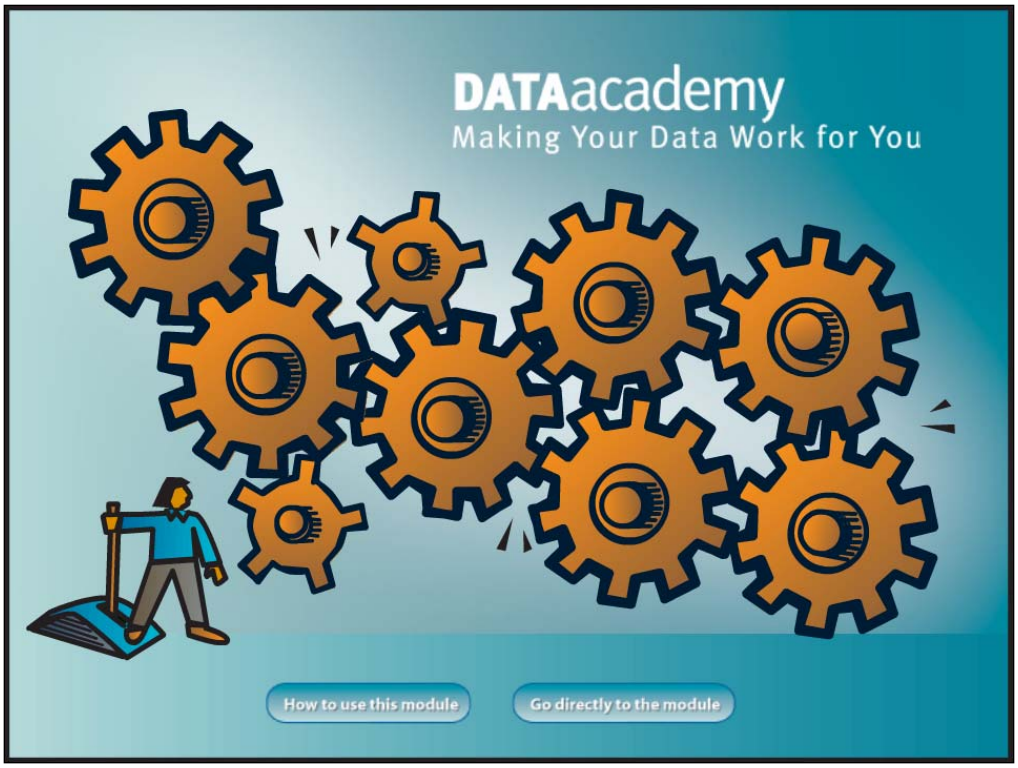



Welcome to Data Academy. Data Academy is a series of online training modules to help Ryan White Grantees be more proficient in collecting, storing, and sharing their data.

Let's get started with the module "Building Partnerships with Staff and Contractors."


This module will help you build partnerships for data collection. These strategies and tools can help you establish a process that works for you, your staff, and your contractors.


By the end of this module, you will be able to…

Identify the key steps to developing a data collection partnership with your program staff and contracted service providers;

Identify communication strategies to help you meet data submission requirements; and

Understand the importance of providing feedback about data submitted to you.

In this module, we will be focusing on getting the data you need from your program staff and contracted service providers. However, many of these general strategies can be used for any data-sharing relationships.

# Key Definitions

## Program Staff

- Individuals working for your program who are involved in any step of the data collection or reporting process

## Contracted Service Providers or Contractors

- Organizations you fund to provide direct services and who are required to provide you with data for reporting

*HRSA refers to contractors as **sub-recipients***

Although they perform different roles, we talk about program staff and contractors together because they face similar data collection challenges. Let's define what we mean when we use these terms.

*Program staff* are individuals working for *your* program who are involved in any step of the data collection or reporting process.

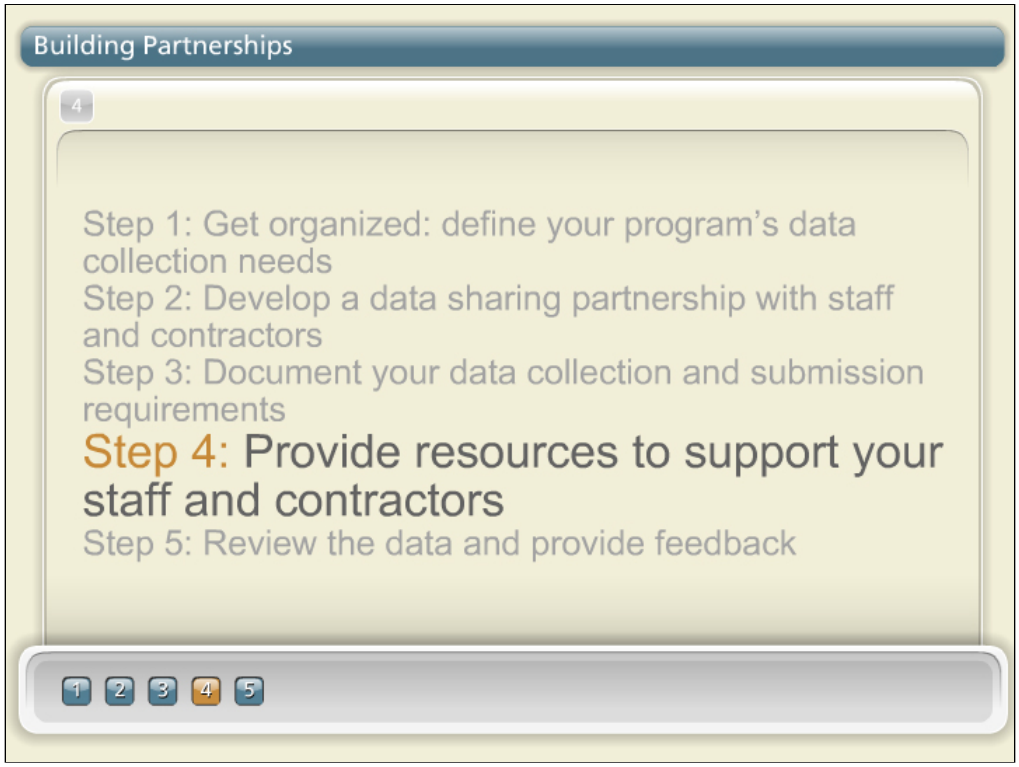
*Contracted service providers* are organizations you fund to provide direct services and who are required to provide you with data for reporting. This are sometimes called sub-grantees. HRSA's HIV/AIDS Bureau refers to contracted service providers as "sub recipients". However, we will use the terms "contracted service providers" or "contractors" in this module because it describes the relationship *you* have with them.


Building collaborative partnerships is essential to getting the data you need. We've identified five steps to help build partnerships with your staff and contractors.

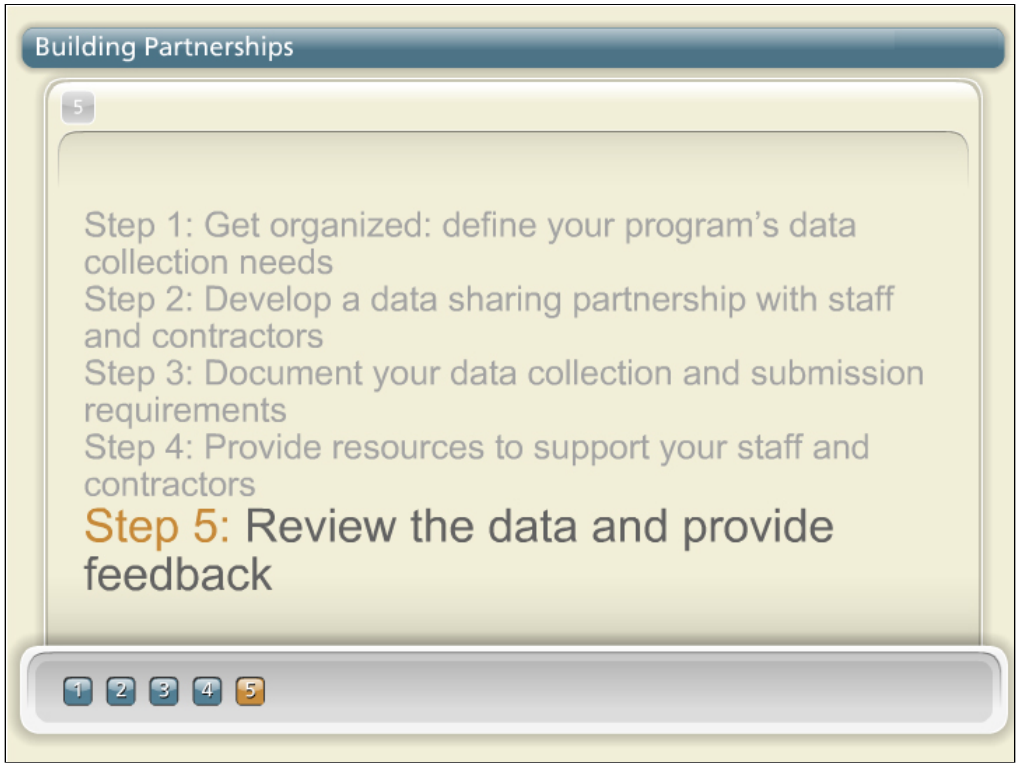
First, get organized. Figure out what data you need. Make sure that you know what data you need for *reporting* and what additional information you need for *other* program activities.


Second, develop a partnership with your staff and contractors by communicating your plans for data collection, finding out what they need, getting input on the data collection process, and making the data available.

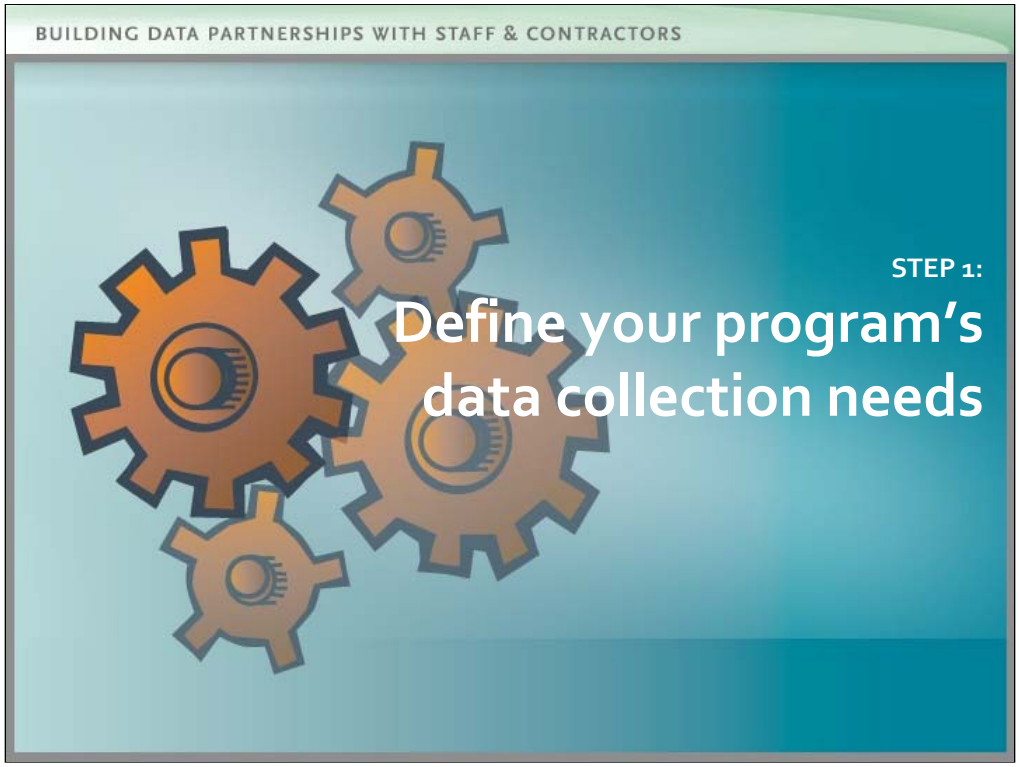

Third, document *what* data should be collected, and how it should be submitted.



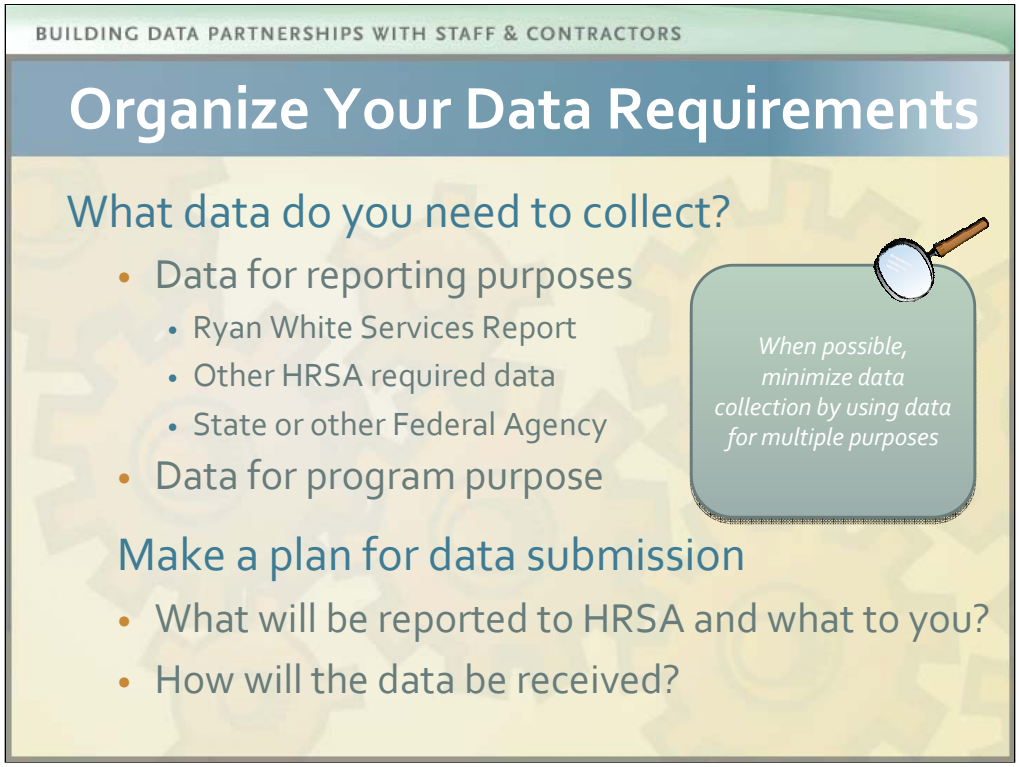

Fourth, provide staff and contractors with training and support to collect, report, and use the data.




Finally, review the data submitted to you and provide feedback about the data and the data submission process. In this module we will discuss each of these steps in detail.




The first step is to *define your program's data collection needs*.




Before you begin working with staff and contractors, it is important to organize your data requirements, and determine what data you need to collect.

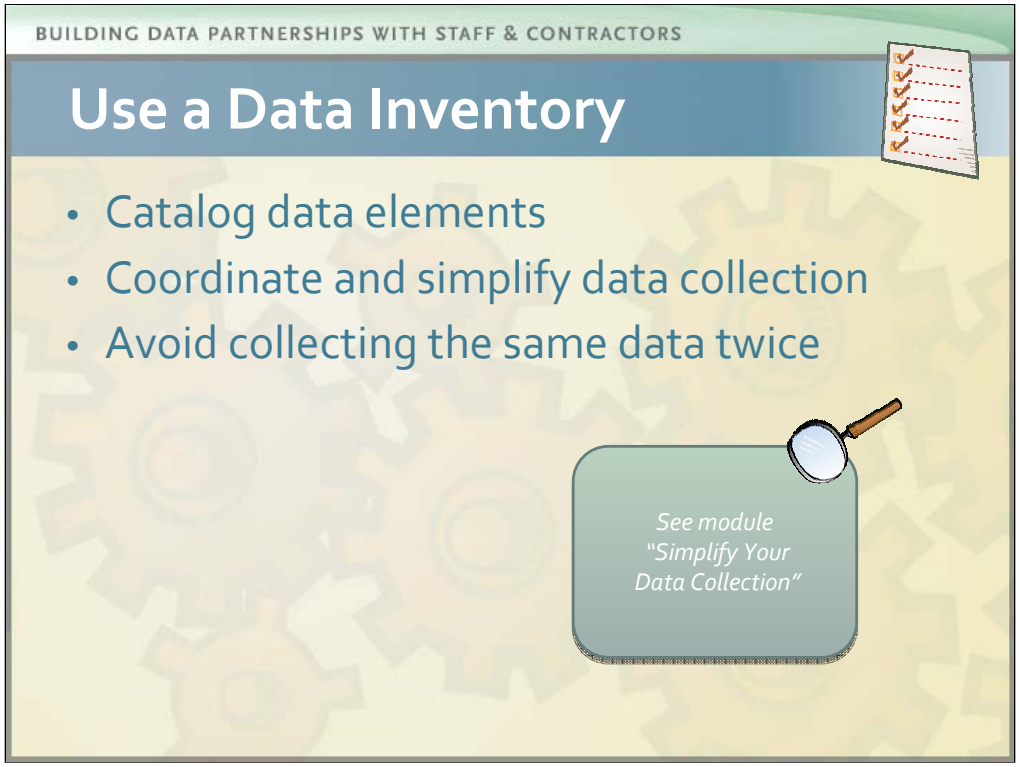
Start with the data you need to collect for *reporting* purposes. This includes program data for the Ryan White Services Report or RSR and other HRSA required data, like for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, and the Minority AIDS Initiative.

You may also be required to report data to your state, or to another federal agency, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Data may also be used for a range of program purposes. Program data can inform decision-making and help with the coordination of clients' care, monitoring and evaluation, quality improvement activities, and grant writing.

Try to reduce the amount of data you need to collect by using the data for more than one purpose whenever possible. For example, the data you require for reporting may meet some of your program's other data needs.

Also, make a plan for how data should be submitted. Determine what data should be reported directly to HRSA, and what should be reported to you. Also make sure that you understand how you – and HRSA will receive the data.




A data inventory can help you organize your data collection needs. A data inventory catalogs the data elements you need to collect, and can help you coordinate and simplify your data collection activities. Because it can help you keep track of what data is needed, a data inventory will help you avoid collecting the same data twice.

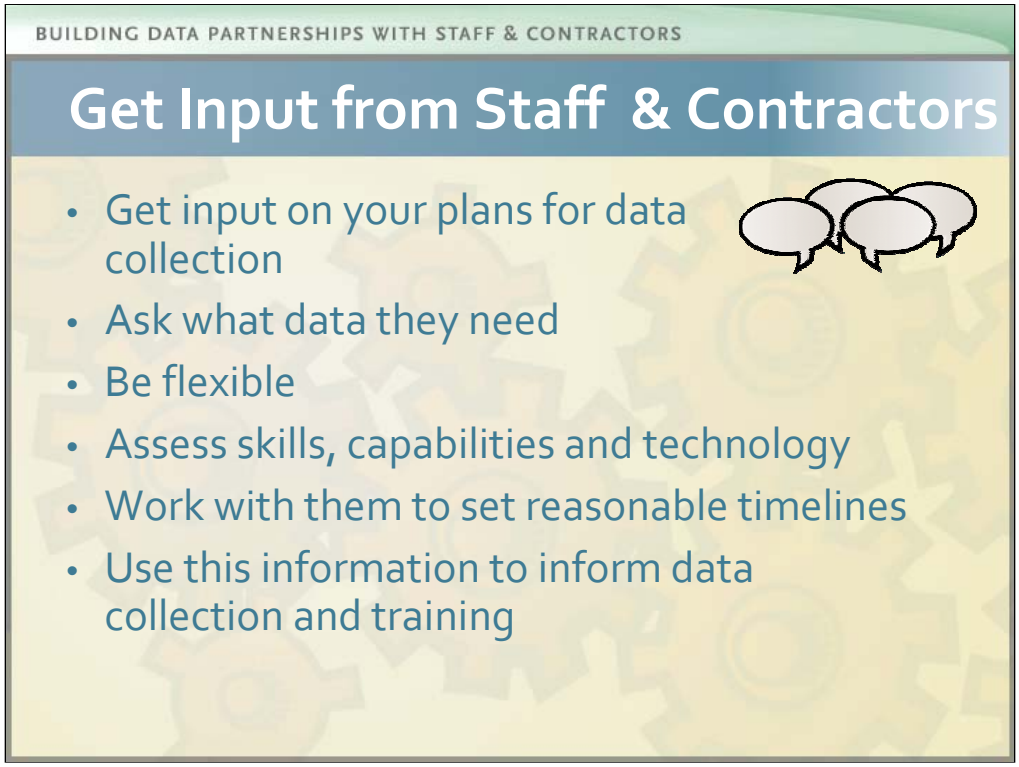
You can learn more about creating a data inventory in the module, "Simply Your Data Collection".


The second step to building effective partnerships is to communicate your plans for data collection to staff and contractors. Find out what they need, gather input on the data collection process, and make the data available to them. It is important to also listen to and address their needs.


When building a partnership, it's important to have good communication. This means being clear about what you need and why.

Begin by sharing your plan for data collection and reporting. Explain *what* data you will need, *why* you need it, and *how* will it be used. Also, explain how the data will need to be reported.

Focus on shared benefits. Your staff and contractors will take more interest in collecting data if they, too, stand to benefit. For example, point out what data elements are collected in order to submit the RSR to HRSA. Then explain that the RSR data are used to demonstrate the need for continued funding support. This purpose is certainly of value to your contractors.




Once you have presented your plan for data collection, ask for input from your staff and contractors – and use this information to improve your plan.

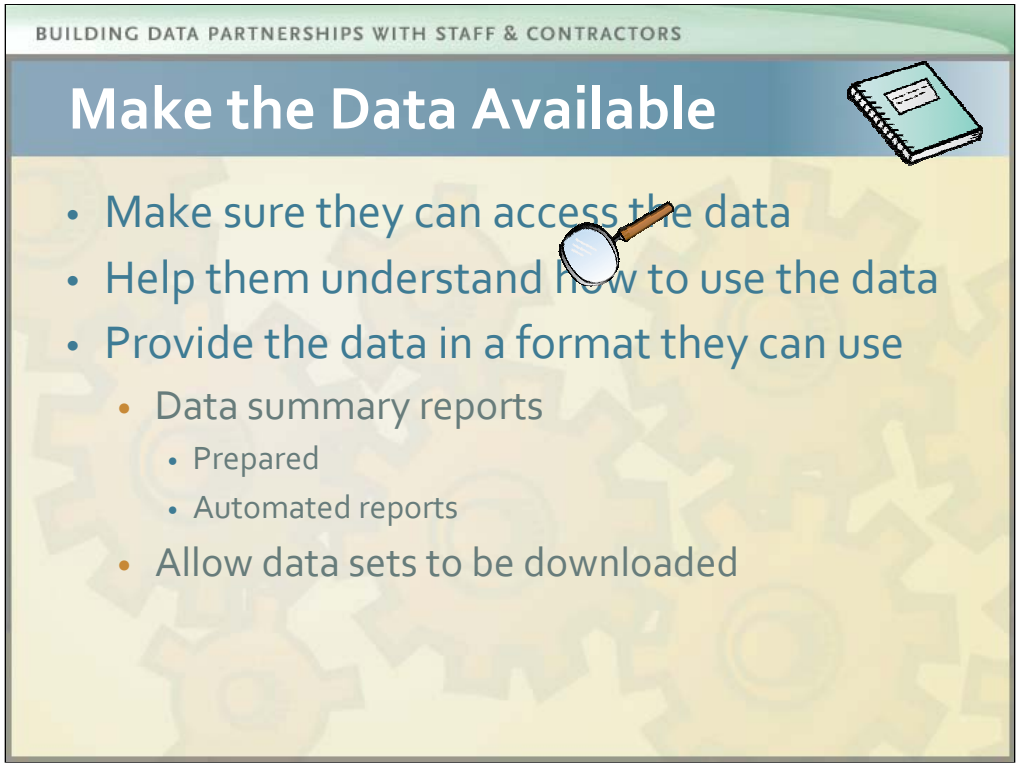
Remember, these are the people that will be collecting your data. Their practical experience with data collection and reporting can help you anticipate and prevent data collection and submission challenges.

Many of the people and organizations that collect data for *you* also need data for their own purposes. Find out what data *they* need, and consider whether your data requirements can be modified so that everyone can benefit.

This may be as simple as adding a new response option – such as an additional category of provider referrals. Or it could involve adding an entirely new data element, particularly if a significant number of your contractors need the information. For example, if organizations in your area are concerned about the need to improve services for a specific target population, then they may want to collect additional behavioral risk or demographic information to help them monitor utilization of services.

While you may not be able to make major changes to data you require for reporting, try to be flexible where you can. Taking these steps to incorporate input from your contractors and staff shows that you have considered their needs in addition to your own. Ask about their computer skills and capabilities, and what technology is available to them. They may need support as they develop the capacity to submit data to you. Work with your contractors to develop reasonable timelines for data submission. Although HRSA has strict reporting deadlines, work with your contractors to establish a schedule that is realistic for them, and gives you enough time to review and approve their data before it is transmitted to HRSA.

Listening to your staff and contractors about their needs will help you plan for data collection training, and will also help you implement reasonable and achievable data requirements.




As we just mentioned, it is likely that your contractors can use the data you require for their own purposes. Make sure they, too, can *access* the data and work with them so they are able to *use* the data. This may mean training on *how* to use data for reporting and for program activities like planning and evaluation.

Share the data in a format they will use.

One option is to provide your contractors with data summary reports. You can prepare reports for your contractors or - if you require everyone to use the same database or online system – you may be able to set up automated, or canned reports that your contractors can generate for themselves.

Another option – if there is a single online system - is to allow contractors to download all of their data as a data set. Also called “raw data” or a “data extract,” this will allow your contractors to conduct their own analyses whenever they want.

How you provide the data depends on their data skills and organizational capacity.


To learn more about data extraction, please see the module, Getting Data from Existing Sources.

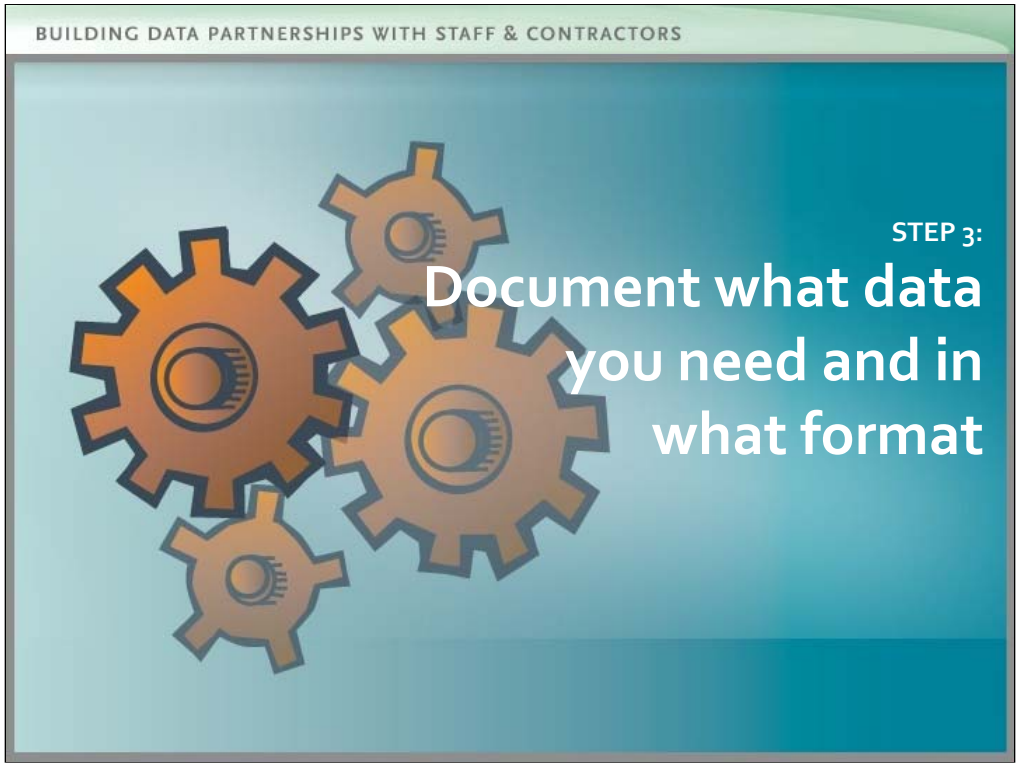

Encourage open and ongoing discussion about data collection with your staff and contractors

Take time during trainings or meetings to present basic data on clients served and services delivered. Highlight achievements and show areas that need further attention, and ask your staff and contractors to share their thoughts about the data in a discussion.

Provide opportunities for them to ask questions, and encourage input. Find out what is working, and what can be improved.

Carefully document their questions and suggestions, and use this to clarify your data requirements and inform planning for future data collection.

All these strategies will help you and your program staff and contractors understand and appreciate the importance of data.




You've had a chance to learn about your staff and contractors' data needs, and they've had a chance to hear from you. You've also received input on your plan for data collection. Now it's time to document your data collection and submission requirements to provide your staff and contractors with clear, consistent guidance.

## Data Collection Requirements

- Provide details on what should be collected and how
  - Definitions and response options
  - Service categories
  - Use RSR definitions
- Keep it organized and easy to reference
- Provide clear guidelines on what data to report
  - Population (e.g. which clients, services, sites, programs)
  - Eligibility information

Many grantees organize all of their data requirements into a program manual or guidance.

Whatever format you chose to document your data collection requirements, provide details on what should be collected, and how.

This documentation should include a definition for every data element, and a list of response options. Clearly define all service categories, such as ambulatory care and case management. For any data that will be used for the RSR, be sure to use the Ryan White definitions and reporting requirements. Get this information directly from the RSR instruction manual.

Make sure that this information is well organized and easy to reference.

Be clear about who needs to report what data to you, and for which clients. Some programs and sites – such as those providing core medical services – will need to provide more detailed clinical data. Furthermore, not all clients are eligible for all services. For example, males are not eligible to be screened for cervical cancer. While this is an obvious exclusion, other eligibility questions will be more complicated. Document all eligibility information for your program and services.

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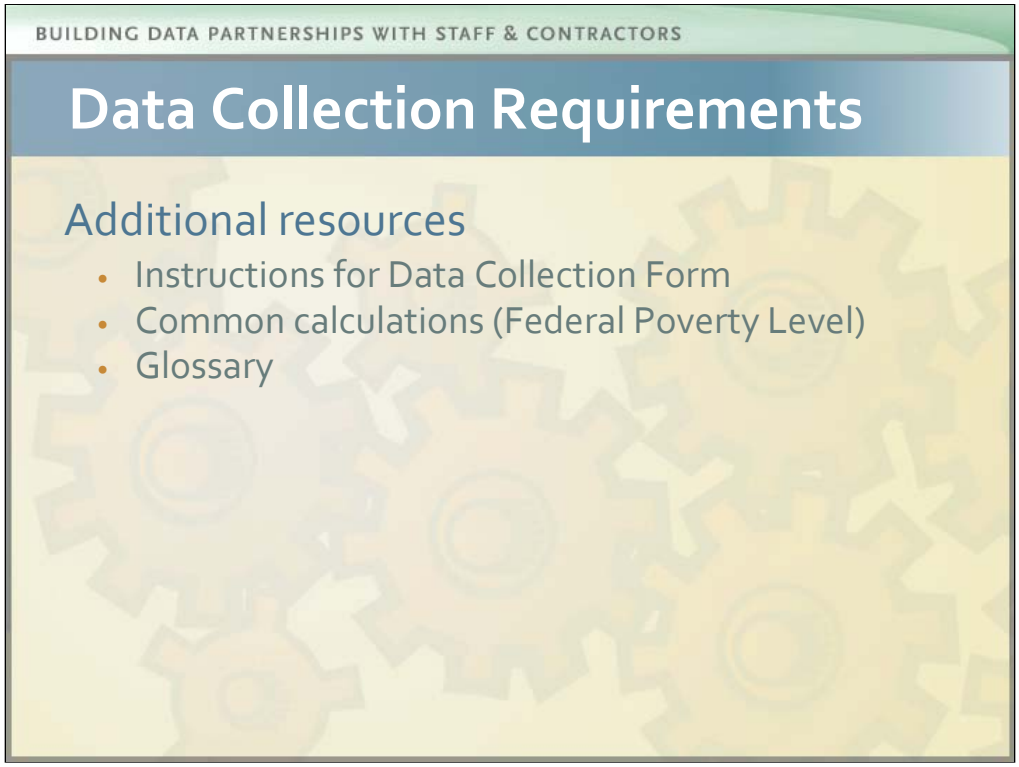
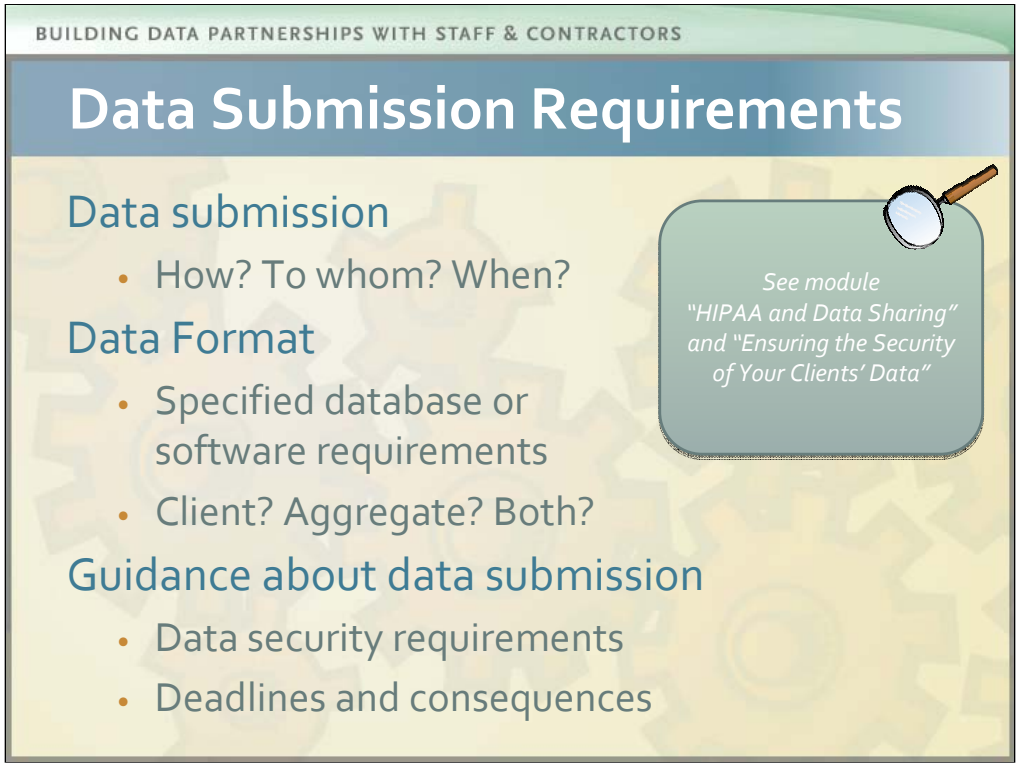



There are other helpful resources you may want document in your guidelines or program manual. For example, if you require a standardized data collection form, include instructions about how to complete the form.

You may also want to include instructions for common calculations, such as for the Federal Poverty Level. You may also wish to include a glossary of common terms.




Documentation of your data *submission* requirements should include *how* data are submitted, *who* the data should be submitted to, and *when* the data should be submitted.

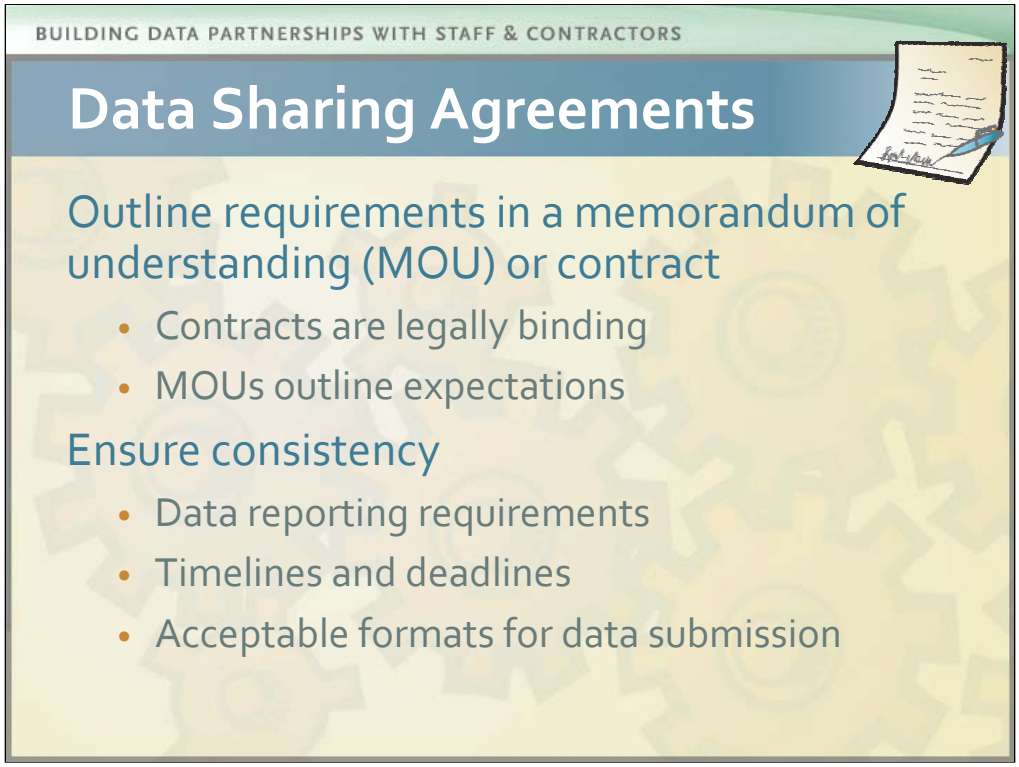
First, provide instructions on your technology requirements. If data will be submitted electronically, explain what types of data files you will be able to accept.

Do you require your contractors to use a specific database or software product for data entry or reporting? If so, be sure to include both hardware and software requirements.

In what format are the data submitted? Client–level? Aggregate-level? Both? If both, it's important to specify which data can be client-level and which must be sent in aggregate form.

Provide guidance on how data should be submitted, including data security requirements for encryption and de-identification. To learn more about sharing data and data security, please see the Data Academy modules on *HIPAA and Data Sharing* and *Ensuring the Security of Your Clients' Data.*

The documentation about your data requirements should also include data submission deadlines along with consequences for not meeting these deadlines.




In some cases, you may want to include your data requirements in a data sharing agreement.

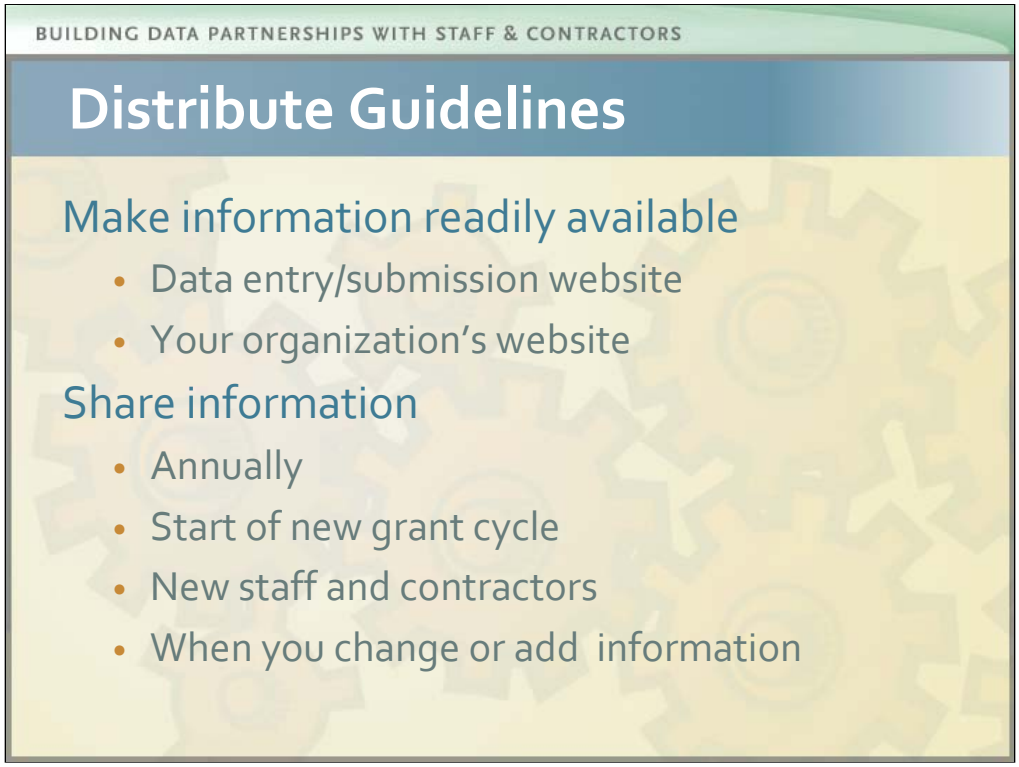
For contracted service providers, outline data submission requirements in either an MOU, or Memorandum of Understanding, or in a contract. These are *not* the same – contracts are legally binding documents while MOUs *can* be binding, but they may also simply document an informal agreement between parties.

Both contracts and MOUs ensure consistency, particularly when there is staff turnover or when data are not being submitted in a timely or acceptable manner.

By including important details of your requirements, such as deadlines and acceptable formats for data submission in a *contract*, you can enforce consequences if you do not get the data on time, or if it is not submitted to you correctly.


It is important to provide your contractors and program staff with resources to help them collect and submit the data you need.

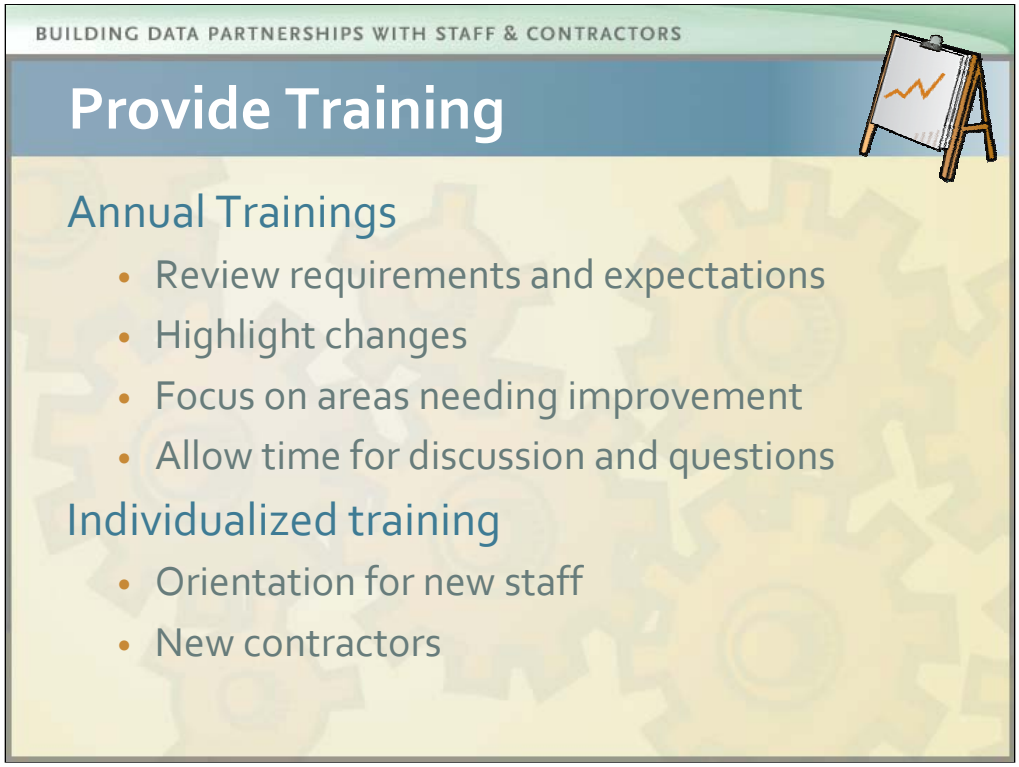
In this next section, we'll talk about how to disseminate your data requirements, and about the kinds of ongoing support you may need to provide.




Now that you have carefully documented your data requirements, make sure the information is readily available to your staff and contractors. Your contractors and staff may use a website for data entry or data submission, or your organization may have its own website. Consider using these online spaces to post this documentation so that your staff and contractors can access it at any time.

Share this information on an annual basis, at the start of any new grant cycle as part of the training or orientation process for program staff and contractors.

It is also important to make copies available whenever you review your requirements.




Data trainings are important opportunities to strengthen partnerships with your staff and contractors, and to make sure that everyone is collecting data correctly and consistently.

Conduct annual trainings to review your requirements and expectations. And be sure to highlight any changes to your data collection and submission requirements.

Your contractors and staff may need support or training about a particular area or topic This may change each year, and you may want to create a session during your annual training to focus on this particular area. For example, if you are concerned about timeliness, consider reviewing the activities people need to accomplish before they can submit their data, and how long these tasks will take.

As always, make sure that you include plenty of time for discussion and questions. This is an important part of the data sharing relationship, and you can use what you learn to improve future trainings. This information will also help you identify common challenges, and show where to provide clarification on data collection and submission processes.

In addition to this annual training, provide individual training for any new staff you hire and when you enter into a new partnership with a contractor. If you can, make this training available to contractors when *they* hire new staff into key data management positions.


Even with proper training and clear guidance, some staff and contractors may need extra individual support.

If you find that staff or contractors are regularly having trouble adhering to your requirements, try to identify the root cause of the problem.

If appropriate, consider working with them to develop an improvement plan. Include intermediate goals and support them with technical support and training as necessary.

When you are not able to offer appropriate support, refer your staff and contractors to outside resources like the RSR trainings or other Ryan White technical assistance through the TARGET center. The TARGET center website is a central source of assistance and training resources for the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program.

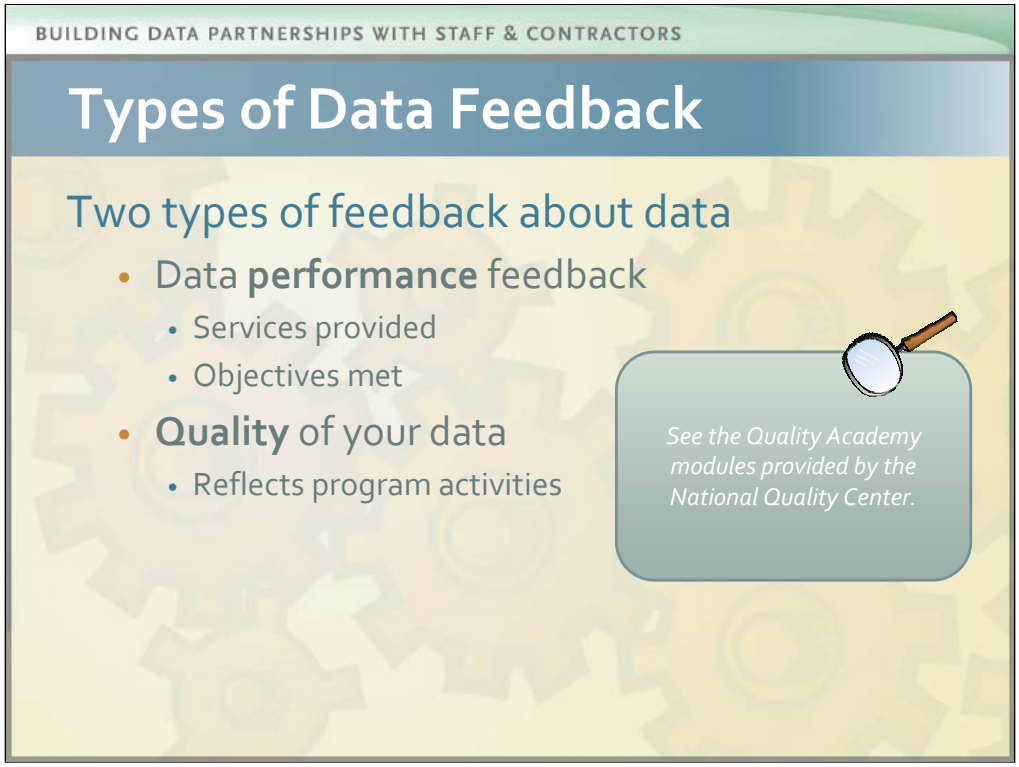

The final step in building partnerships with staff and contractors is to review their data submissions for quality and provide feedback.

Taking the time to provide feedback shows your staff and contractors that you *value* and *use* the data, they will submit better quality data to you.


Many grantees already conduct site visits or in-person meetings with their contractors and staff. Take advantage of this time to review data and discuss any potential issues or solutions. Or set up  regular phone calls to discuss data quality and provide feedback.

Allow plenty of time for questions and discussions about the data.  As data quality issues are identify  work together to come up with a plan for improvement. You may find it helpful to develop key questions or routine procedures for reviewing data and providing feedback. This can help you review the data consistently over time. It can also help you assess data quality challenges across multiple sites or contractors.

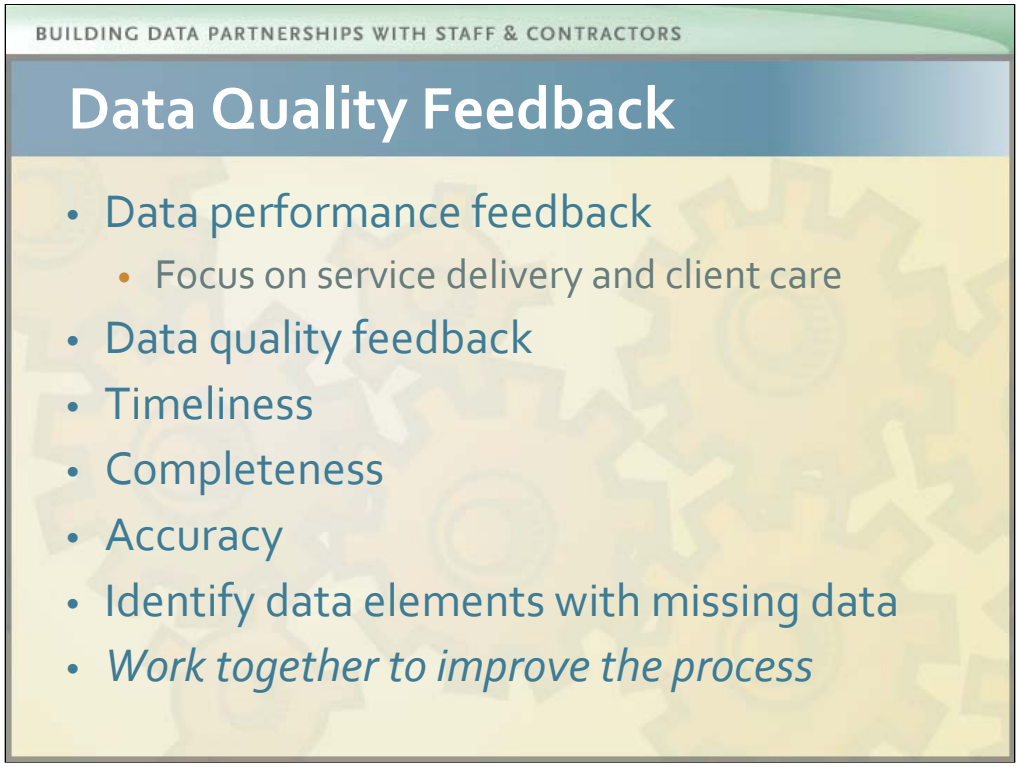
Make sure you document your feedback to keep track of past comments, look at improvements and long-term challenges, and follow up on any recommendations you made.




For data collection, there are two types of feedback.

The first is data performance feedback, or feedback on the quality of care and services being provided. Did your contractor meet its objectives or reaching a specific target population? Did your program staff increase the percentage of female clients receiving Pap smears during the past year? To learn more about performance feedback, see the Quality Academy modules provided by the National Quality Center.

The second type of feedback is on the quality of your data. Feedback on data quality is focused on whether the data accurately reflects program activities.




The type of feedback you provide will depend on whether the data are collected within your program, or submitted to you by a contractor. In general, feedback on data quality should focus on timeliness, completeness, and accuracy.

Identify  any data elements where information is missing for a significant number of clients. If your staff or contractors have submitted a significant amount incomplete data, ask them to go back and fill it in, and then resubmit the information to you.

Make sure the data accurately reflect the services that are being provided by your program. If the data are different from you expected, ask why. Find out if the data are showing a real change in program activities, or if the problem is related to how the data are collected or reported to you.

If there is a problem with how data are collected or reported to you, work together to come up with a plan to improve the process.


Here's an example of identifying missing data and providing feedback:

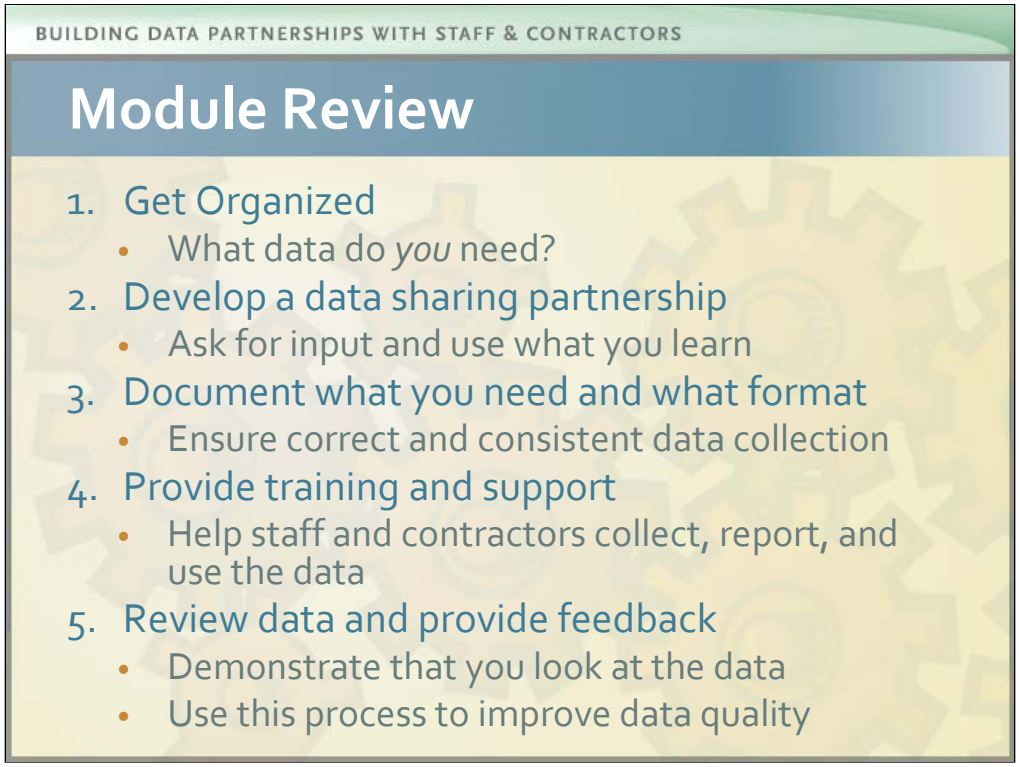
In reviewing data collected by one of your sites, you find that the number of client visits for medical case management is lower than you expected.

One possible explanation is that the number of clients is low because the number of visits was truly low. If this is the case, the data are accurate, and your contractor should focus on why medical case management services are not provided more consistently.

Another possibility is that the data does not accurately reflect the number of visits. You may find that some case management visits were not entered into the program database, or that these visits were entered incorrectly.

It turns out that the definition for medical case management was ambiguous in your data collection documentation. This site reported most of the visits under another category.

In this case, you would want to update your data collection guidelines, by clarifying the confusing data element definition. You will also want to provide this clarification to other contractors.




In this module, we discussed five steps to building a successful partnership for data collection. Let's review what we've learned.

First, get organized. Figure out what data you need.

Second, develop a data sharing partnership with your staff and contractors. Ask for their input, and use what you learn to create a shared understanding of *why* data collection is important.

Third, clearly document what data you need and in what format you need it. Ensure that data are collected correctly, and consistently.

Fourth, provide the training and support that your staff and contractors need to do their collect, report and use the data.

Finally, review the data you receive, and provide feedback. Demonstrate that you are looking at the data, and work with staff and contractors to improve the quality of the data.


You have now reached the end of this module. We hope that you enjoyed the module and that it helped you build skills for collecting, reporting, using and sharing data. To view more Data Academy modules, visit the Data Academy home page. And to learn about other resources for Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program grantees, visit the TARGET Center website.