DATA COLLECTION FOR BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The data collection required of Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) grantees may feel daunting but is essential to demonstrate and understand your program's success and to assist the Bureau with its own reporting responsibilities. The data you collect is not just a means to an end; it is an opportunity for continuous evaluation and improvement, and not just for your BJA program—the information, trends, and lessons learned pulled from the data you gather can be applied broadly to benefit your agency's other activities. Establishing a *data collection plan* is one of the first things you will do as a new grantee. To help ease the process, and to ensure that the data you collect works for you, your agency, and your program, we are sharing several tips, best practices, and recommendations for developing a data collection plan. We will also highlight several considerations for your data collection plan including integrity, performance management, and reporting requirements.

As you work through the development of your data collection plan, the BJA Performance Management Helpdesk is an avenue for support. The Helpdesk can be reached via phone (1–888–252–6867) or email (bjapmt@ojp.usdoj.gov).

The Importance of Integrity in Data Collection

The data you collect ensures that BJA and your agency can:

- Identify areas of success and potential areas for improvement, so that you can identify program needs (e.g., training and technical assistance needs, revisions to program design/implementation, etc.).

- Track grant activity and progress toward program goals, so that BJA can respond to external requests (e.g., Congressional inquiries, media requests, federal auditors, etc.) and create a variety of reports highlighting program successes for external audiences, the White House.

- Understand how funds are being distributed to inform BJA's decisions regarding their budget, strategic plan, and future funding.

- Comply with the reporting requirements of federal laws, including the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRA Modernization Act), the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act), and the Grant Reporting Efficiency and Agreements Transparency (GREAT) Act of 2019.

To both satisfy your reporting requirements and ensure the validity of data-based decisions made regarding your program, it is vital that the data you collect be thorough and accurate, and quality assurance is critical to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data collected. Without quality assurance, data is inherently suspect, and decisions based-on or conclusions drawn-from incomplete or inaccurate data can be damaging to a program and those individuals that rely on it. Having good data discipline enables you to thoroughly understand and improve your program by guaranteeing decisions are based on accurate information.

Data Collection and Performance Management

Performance Management is the systematic use of strategic planning, goals, performance indicators, evaluations, analysis, and data-driven reviews, and reporting to improve program results and ensure effective, efficient agency operations. This systematic process promotes ongoing analysis of a program's performance, creates the potential for continuous process improvements, and relies on **performance measurement**—the regular collection of data and indicators to assess whether the correct processes are performed, and the desired results achieved.

The data; or **performance measures**, are established by BJA for each individual program. These measures are defined in the grant solicitation you responded to and may be updated or revised during the life of the program.

	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Description	Program resources	Actions that convert inputs to outputs	Products or services	Measurable progress toward program goals
Example	• Grant funding • Human resources • Information and analytical resources	• Data analysis • Trainings/meetings • Partnership development • Crime prevention strategies	• Identify new hot spots • Train staff • Develop program materials	• Reduce crime • Increase number of cross-sector partnerships

Performance measures are parameters against which progress toward goals can be assessed—a common language linking your plans and your performance—and consist of your program's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes (logic model). While this data satisfies the reporting requirement of your grant it also provides an excellent opportunity to self-assess your program and your agency's processes.

When developing a data collection plan, you should begin with a thorough understanding of the questions on which BJA will ask you to report. As a first step, review your program's performance measures, focusing on the numbers, narratives, or other data you will need to collect to answer the questions posed by BJA. Once you have a firm understanding of the types of data you will collect, you can formulate a plan for how your agency will collect data and report back to BJA. Performance measures for BJA programs and other resources can be found on our website, https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/performance-measures.

Data collected during the life of your grant can answer questions such as: Are the goals of the program being met? Is the program making a difference to the individuals served? Which specific areas of the program are working well, and which areas are not working as well? The answers to these questions—as well as lessons learned from identifying and addressing areas for improvement—can be used to improve your program and your agency's processes.
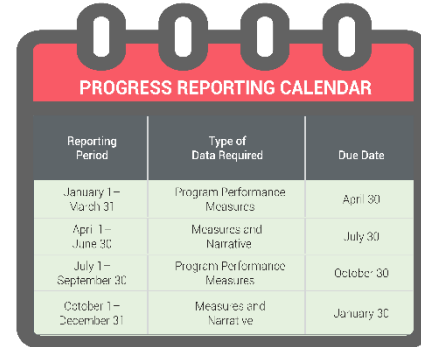
In addition to feeding into the performance management of your program, the data collected can also benefit your agency by being used to:

- Inform state legislatures about laws that need updating
- Apply for outside funding to expand the work of your program or agency
- Adjust outreach strategies to ensure you reach the intended audience
- Shift resources as necessary to meet program needs and needs of individuals served
- Identify training and professional development needs of staff
- Increase community awareness of program outcome goals and the good work being done
- Support budget and planning–agencies can better prioritize limited resources if the outcomes of the various programs/projects are known
- Increase accountability to the community
- Identify program trends
- Compare against public demographic data to ensure you are reaching all facets of the community
- Respond to future grant solicitations.

Required Reporting for Program Data

The data you collect on your program will be reported to BJA on a regularly scheduled basis through various reports. As you develop your data collection plan, it is important to understand the types of reports you will be required to complete, the length of the reporting periods, and when reports are due:

- **Quarterly Progress Report**
  This report collects information on grantee activities and gives you an opportunity to inform BJA if your grant program is on track with goals and objectives. This is when you will report on your program's specific performance measures.

- **Quarterly Financial Report**
  This report documents for BJA that you are spending federal funds on allowed activities and expenses.

- **Semi-Annual Narrative Report**
  This is your chance to tell BJA more about your work, including your progress towards goals and objectives. This report includes narrative questions related to grantee and subgrantee activities.

PROGRESS REPORTING CALENDAR

Reporting Period	Type of Data Required	Due Date
January 1– March 31	Program Performance Measures	April 30
April 1– June 30	Measures and Narrative	July 30
July 1– September 30	Program Performance Measures	October 30
October 1– December 31	Measures and Narrative	January 30

When collecting data, you should track it in the time interval that is easiest for you and makes the most sense for your program. You can then report the combined data to BJA on the report due date.

Overarching Best Practices for Data Collection

When developing your data collection plan, you may benefit from the checklist below. This checklist captures best practices and recommendations based on lessons learned over time by grantees, subgrantees, and analysts supporting BJA programs and is meant to guide you in the development of your plan.

Start as soon as possible

Reporting begins the day your award starts.

- Print out your performance measures.
- Share performance measures with everyone responsible for collecting data (staff, subgrantees, outside agencies).
- Familiarize program staff with the data they need to collect.
- Contact the BJA Helpdesk early and often with questions about performance measures or reporting requirements.
- Report data during the first quarter, even if reporting, "no grant activity," for the first quarter.

If this is your first time reporting BJA performance measures, contact the helpdesk to schedule a "Welcome to Performance Measurement" technical assistance session.

Scan current work

Consider all of your agency's data collection activities and review your agency's data repositories.

- Identify overlaps or discrepancies between collection activities already in place and those required for your grant.
- Determine if BJA performance measures can be added to repositories in use or if a separate tracking form is needed.
- Consider reporting time frames for other grants and if those will overlap or work with BJA reporting periods.

Seek guidance

Support from BJA is available to help you ensure consistency in reporting for the life of your award.

- Agree on the definition of your measures as they relate to your award's goals and objectives.
- Agree on expectations regarding data to be highlighted in responses to narrative questions.

- Reach out to the BJA Helpdesk with questions or if you need additional assistance understanding performance measures or the performance measurement process.

Do not lose sight of the forest for the trees

Attention to detail is important, but you need to think big when developing your plan.

- Decide how will you explain your data in the semiannual narrative report.
- Tie your reporting back to your program goals and objectives.

Engage your partners

Partnering agencies may have a big impact on your data collection practices.

To comply with data privacy laws, it may be necessary to implement formal agreements (e.g., MOUs/MOAs, consent forms, court orders, etc.) to share data across partnering agencies or data.

- Identify program evaluation or academic partners:
  - Agencies that signed an MOU/MOA.
  - Agencies that signed a letter of support with you on your grant application.
  - Subgrantees or other partner agencies.
- Include your partners early in your planning process.
- Explore partnering with universities or think tanks to assess current data and data collection practices.
- Implement formal agreements necessary to share data in compliance with data privacy laws.
- Determine whether you currently share data collection methods or systems with your partners.

Decide on a data collection method

Choose the collection method that works best for you and your program.

- Recognize that data sharing is much easier among partners that use the same data collection systems.
- Weigh potential complications if you do not share data collection systems with partners.
- Consider available data collection methods, including case management systems or other databases, spreadsheets, tracking intake forms, etc.
- Set up data tracking tools and develop internal processes to ensure the collection of thorough, accurate data.
- Ensure that your data collection method is not too onerous.
- Work with the BJA Helpdesk to determine whether you want to use a TRAX spreadsheet to collect data for your program. BJA provides TRAX spreadsheets for some programs to ease the burden of data collection.

States, local jurisdictions, and agencies typically use multiple data systems to collect information. These systems often cannot easily communicate or share information, and they may collect different fields or data.

Data collection is an agency-wide initiative

Everyone involved in your program should be knowledgeable of your collection process.

- Ensure consensus on what to record and how to record it through training.
- Provide data collection training to everyone (including subgrantees) collecting data for the program.
- Document all relevant processes to ensure institutional knowledge is maintained should there be turnover.
- Establish a means to capture success stories on a regular basis from program staff that provide services.
- Create a central repository for data collection documentation, including:
  - Performance measures
  - BJA performance measure training and resources
  - Formal data sharing agreements
  - Your program's documented data collection process
  - Your program's data collection training materials
  - Any tools you may use (i.e., TRAX, FAQs, etc.).

Make a formal plan

After considering all relevant factors, you are ready to develop your data collection plan.

> *BJA analysts will reach out to you with questions or request that you make corrections if your data looks incomplete or contradictory. To ensure you have enough time to review data for accuracy, consider having subrecipients enter their data 10—15 days before the reporting due date so that you have time to review data and submit the report to BJA on time.*

- Identify and assign staff roles and responsibilities, including:
  - o Who will access the BJA Reporting System?
  - o Who is responsible for collecting data?
  - o Who is responsible for inputting data?
  - o Who is responsible for analyzing data for accuracy?
  - o Who will communicate with subgrantees?
  - o Who will monitor subgrantee reporting?
  - o Who will review subgrantee data for accuracy?
  - o Who are the backups for these roles?
- Document the types data to be collected and methods and tools used for data collection.
- Detail manner and method of quality assurance to ensure thoroughness and accuracy of data.
- Reference formal agreements for data sharing.
- Allow enough time for subrecipients to enter data and for you to review and create a report.

Think though additional uses for your data

The data you collect has the potential to show the impacts, not just of your program, but of your agency.

- Use data that is credible, important, and best illustrates where and how your agency is most impactful. Data can be used internally by your agency to:
  - o Support funding decisions/seek additional funding.
  - o Respond to future grant solicitations.
  - o Identify strategic needs.
  - o Formulate outreach strategies.

Conclusion and Resources

Assistance is available to guide you through your performance management journey. You can contact the BJA Helpdesk with questions related to data collection, performance measures, reporting deadlines, and more. The helpdesk can be reached via phone (1-888-252-6867) or email (bjapmt@ojp.usdoj.gov).

BJA HELPDESK
Monday−Friday
8:30 a.m.−5:00 p.m. ET
Closed on Federal Holidays
Toll-free number: 1−888−252−6867
bjapmt@ojp.usdoj.gov