

Building an Effective Assessment Plan



Prepared by

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Our Approach: Rigorous and Realistic Assessment

We aim to balance the rigor of established assessment approaches with the realistic expectation that data collection needs to be nimble enough to respect the integrity of educational programs. As such, we prioritize embedded and responsive assessment approaches without requiring too heavy a lift from participants, instructors, and program leaders.

This approach emphasizes our Collaborative Assessment Model (Bathgate & Claydon, 2021), which focuses on building effective evaluation partnerships upheld by aligned measures, actionable results, inclusive methods, and sustainable design.

The assessment planning we propose uses a robust integration of realist (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Westhorp, 2014) and developmental (Patton, 2010) evaluation approaches. This emphasizes “why” a program functions well rather than solely “whether or not” it functions well. The plan identifies generative mechanisms, or underlying factors that drive targeted outcomes, that can be applied to other areas of the program in an ongoing basis. Additionally, our approach reduces disruption of programming by leveraging data that is produced as part of engaging with the associated activities. Building variation in the modes of data collection offers a more holistic narrative of the function and impact of the program.





Goal Development & Assessment Alignment

Information below taken from the “Key Concepts for Starting Evaluation,” Bathgate, 2023 white paper, based on principles of Collaborative Assessment Model (Bathgate & Claydon, 2021).

The evaluation and assessment does not need to be scary! Much of the work of an evaluation is connecting well-articulated goals to the data generated from sequential steps in your project. In some cases, much of these data are generated as part of the program’s activities (attendance, examples of work, mid-term feedback, self-assessment activities). In other cases, there are strategic data collection efforts that invite participants to contribute their perspectives (alumni surveys, pre/post measures, focus groups). We encourage you to take a realistic and developmental approach to your evaluation, building in strategic data collection with complementary data analyses and reporting.

Don’t know where to start? Here are some key concepts to keep in mind.

- **Start with the end in mind:** Be able to define what success looks like for your program. Confirm this vision is shared with your partners or team. As you go through the evaluation process, confirm each step is aligned with these successes.
- **Identify the steps to that success:** Identify the program activities that you expect to generate this successful outcome. Build in places for feedback on the program so adjustments can be made to accentuate strengths and adjust challenges.
- **Measure only what you have a plan to use:** Not everything can be measured at once! Prioritize specific evaluation questions over time since they will each require thoughtful analyses. Avoid having piles of data without a plan by assuring the data you collect has a clear purpose and identify who will clean, analyze, and report on the data.
- **Documentation is data:** Running your program will generate valuable data to inform your evaluation. Systematically documenting data such as class topics, the disciplinary representation of speakers and students, student attendance patterns, and artifacts related to activities can help you answer whether you are meeting program outcomes, such as recruiting students from particular disciplinary backgrounds or maintaining retention of students through the course.
- **Use assessment as an invitation and conversation with your participants:** Set the tone of your assessments to show you value your participants and consider their perspective. For example, telling them what to expect in the assessments and how the data will be used; Use inviting language, respect their time, and give them varied ways to contribute their feedback; Build trust with participants by sharing what you find with them to show how their feedback has impacted the program.

Questions to ask yourself to build the assessment you really want:

Introduction and goal setting

- What are the big picture goals and outcomes related to your project?
- What are the other less obvious “hopes and dreams” you have for your project?
- Who is the audience you are looking to serve? What might their expectations be?
- Who are the funders of your project, if any? What might their expectations be?
- What are the big activities of the project, what are participants expected to do?
- What are you hoping that assessment data will allow you to do, say, or change in regard to your project?
- What would a successful assessment look like for you? What kinds of themes or conclusions would be helpful to know in six months or so, for example?



Questions to ask yourself to build the assessment you really want (continued)

Deciding on method and data to collect

- Is there any existing data that could inform your project or this assessment? What do you already know from your experience or from talking to those involved with your project?
- What kinds of data are you thinking might help inform this work?
- Are there limitations (logistic or theoretical) that constrain the type of data collected?
- What types of data are already being generated by your program structure (e.g., artifacts, admission documents, attendance)?
- If you have already been collecting data, how has that experience been? What have been the successes and struggles?
- Are there internal or external deadlines for your project based on the results of a designed assessment?

When reviewing methods and measures

- Does the developed assessment plan include anything that is not connected to one of the goals/questions?
- Are any of the goals/questions not being addressed through the current assessment?

Data security & respect for participants

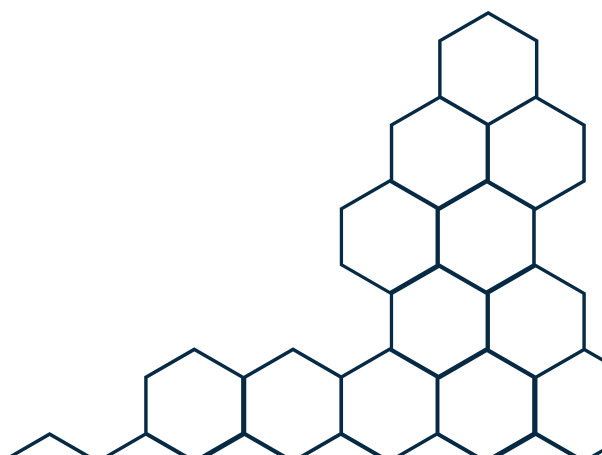
- Who will have access to the data (immediately and longer-term)?
- Who will be included in this part of the assessment? Is there a group of people who are not included at this phase and need to be? Is there a group of people who are included at this phase and may not need to be?
- Will you need to be able to match up individuals over time?
- Will you need to link a person's data to other information within the university?
- If any identifying information is collected (either by design or by a person's self-disclosure), how can we assure participants' confidentiality?
- Are you planning to make a generalizable claim to publish or present at conferences?

Analysis and reporting

- What are your thoughts on analyzing the data? Do you have the support you need to do that? Are any steps unclear?
- Who are you hoping to share the results with? There may be multiple audiences. For example, a funding agency, department chair, university committee, graduate students, instructors, etc.
- How are you planning to share the findings back to participants or other stakeholders?

Tone and approach

- In what ways can assessment communications and methods serve to build trust between your project and participants?
- How can you demonstrate to participants that you take their input seriously and will use (or have used) their data to inform programmatic adjustments?
- Have you respected participants' time, effort, and perspectives by requesting only what is necessary from them?



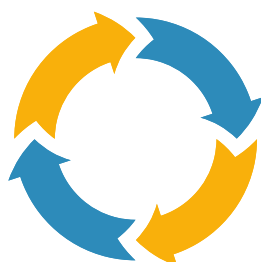


Building the Plan

Programs vary in their specific outcomes, depending on their content, learner audience, scope, and funder. What do you need to know about your participants and the function of your program? What else might your funders be asking you to consider? The following example shows what goals could look like for a program. A reasonable number of goals may be two to five.

Clear goals with measurable outcomes help guide the “how” and “what” of assessment plans.

Goal	Potential Methods (HOW data will be collected)	Examples of Measures (WHAT data will be collected)
Recruit and retain public health leaders in the global south	Collect strategic information on the admissions form as participants register; Tracking who earns subsequent certificate	Number and proportion of individuals in public health leadership positions (e.g., director, CEO, provost) in the global south who 1) enroll and 2) earn a certificate
Identify which approaches to our program were most useful and which were most challenging	End-of-program reflection	Themes from what participants found most useful and challenging to their learning and overall experience
Confirm expectations of students are aligning with what the program offers	Admissions data; Pre-program survey; End-of-program reflection	Categories of reasons people enrolled, what they expect from the program, and reflection on whether the program met these



Expect iteration! It’s part of the process. Draft out your goals, methods, measures and note any overlap, gaps, or questions. Then revise and review.

Example of Aligned Assessment Plan

After refining the goals, methods, and measures, place them together and add points of contacts to ensure the plan can be carried through well.

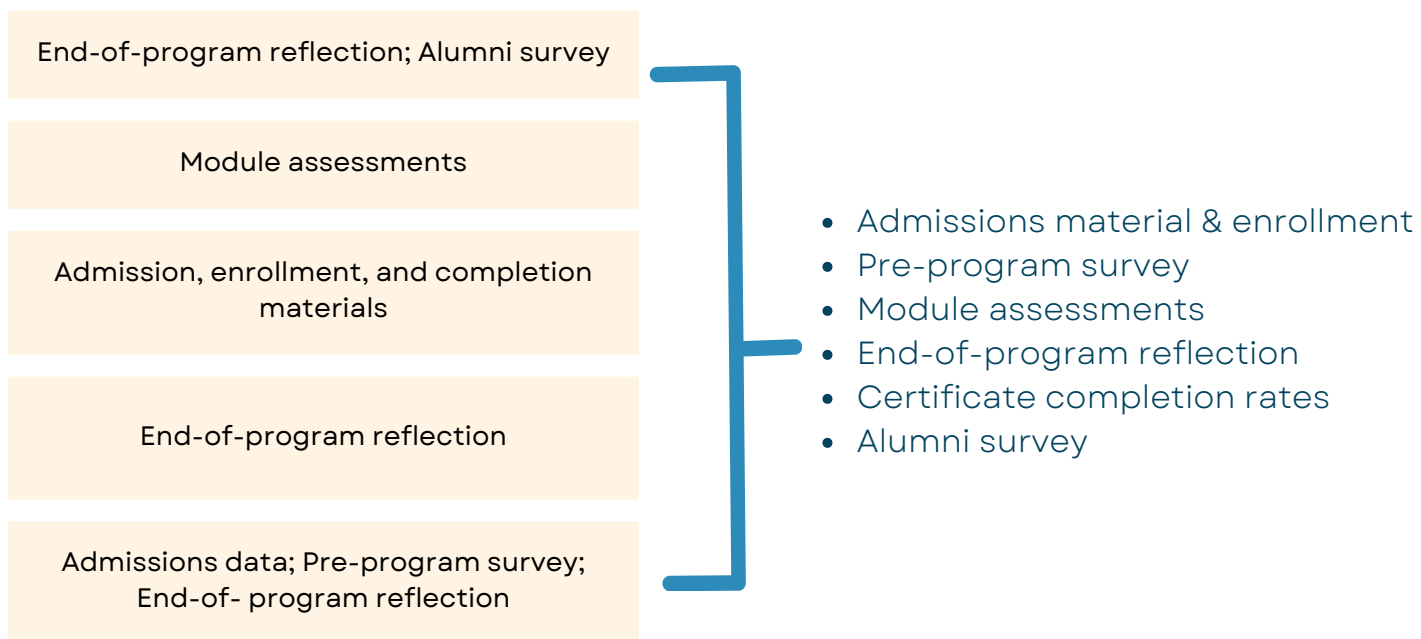
Goal	Method (the how)	Measure (the what)	Point of Contact
Demonstrate positive and meaningful impact on certificate earners' careers	End-of-program reflection; Alumni survey	Mixed-method items asking earners' perceptions of career impact; Reported examples of career impacts	Role or name
Demonstrate positive and meaningful impact on certificate earners' learning program-related material	Module assessments	Confirmation of earners' meeting of learning outcomes; Occasional documentation of assessment responses to demonstrate examples of learning	Role or name
Recruit and retain public health leaders in the global south	Admission, enrollment, and completion materials	Number and proportion of individuals in public health leadership positions (e.g., director, CEO, provost) in the global south who 1) enroll and 2) earn a certificate	Role or name
Identify which approaches to our program were most useful and which were most challenging	End-of-program reflection	Themes from what participants found most useful and challenging to their learning and overall experience	Role or name
Confirm expectations of students are aligning with what the program offers	Admissions data; Pre-program survey; End-of-program reflection	Categories of reasons people enrolled, what they expect from the program, and reflection on whether the program met these	Role or name



Setting Assessment Activities

Now that you have articulated your goals, measures, and the like, clarify what data collection efforts will be needed to be overseen. Pulling together your methods can be a helpful step in this process, particularly as you put it into your timeline.

In the example above, the methods overlap and can be consolidated to the following:



Please ask yourself these questions before going on:

Does what you are measuring reflect the activities of your program?

Do all of your assessment activities connect to a larger goal?

Do all of your goals have assessment activities connected to them?

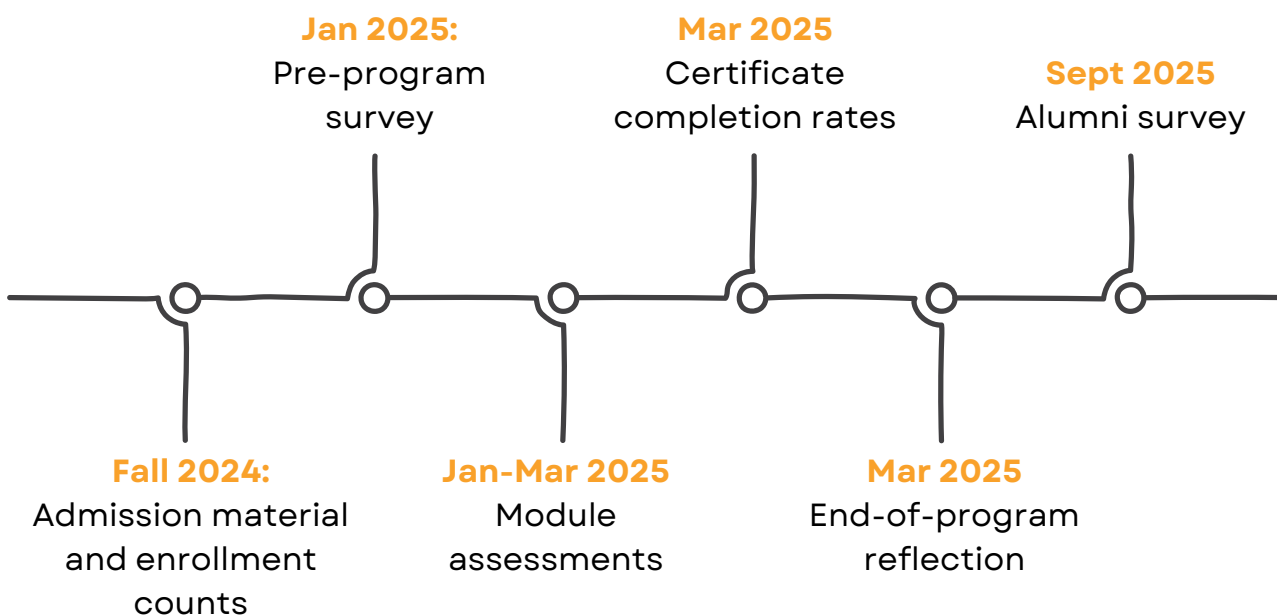
If you answer yes to all these, carry on!

Setting the Timeline

The purpose of the assessment timeline is to assure your plan fits into ongoing program activities and gets rolled into concrete planning. The timeline also helps avoid last-minute scrambling for data.

Please notice that this timeline does not build in data preparation and analysis, as these timelines fluctuate based on your program's goals, choices of data collection, experience with and capacity for data analysis, and simply coordinating meeting schedules. Activities such as putting the measures into a digital platform or downloading and cleaning the data are all inherent in the assessment process. We encourage you to place these timelines into your workflow as well.

Take a look at the methods you synthesized (see "Pulling it All Together"). Now map these onto a reasonable and realistic time frame, given the cadence of other activities in your program. An example is given on the next page.



Please ask yourself this question before going on:

Does this plan sound attainable given your team's capacity and expectations? Aim for reasonable pacing that provides assessment answers you can build on over time.

If you answered yes, carry on!

Selecting the Actual Measures

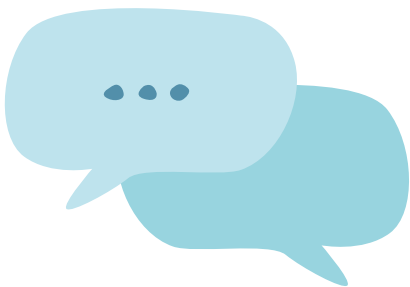


Once you have your goal and methods aligned, you have a foundation for identifying measures to use for data collection. There are many forms of data collection. Though we recognize people are often most familiar with survey work, there are many alternatives that encourage creative approaches to inviting learners' voices into the program assessment.

Regardless of the mechanism you use to collect your data, we recommend including email language and survey introductory language that is inviting and lays clear expectations of the: 1) purpose of the survey, 2) how the data will be used and who will see it, 3) and how long the survey may take.

A pivotal decision in survey design is whether you will be able to see who has responded to the survey, such as by name, NetID, or email. If you have identifying information you can cross-reference information about individuals to understand patterns across year of study, discipline, geographical location, and the like. If you do not collect this information, you may want to ask respondents for their year of study and any relevant professional and demographic information you would like to explore. This will help you keep track of data over time and look for larger trends year over year.

A note about validity: It may be tempting to rely on previously published scales to measure your outcomes. While this is a reasonable step to consider, using a previously published scale does not ensure validity of your measures. There are multiple considerations to validity. Sample size, alignment to goals, participant audience, and the like all affect interpretation of data, regardless of whether a particular measure has been used in the past. Previously validated scales are often a great place to start, though it does not automatically determine their use for a specific program.



Selecting and collecting your measures are not enough. Communication underscores everything! See ideas on the next page.



Communication

What you assess and how you approach assessment communicates what you value.

Treat your assessment as a form of communication with your current and potential students, instructors, staff, and funders.

Before any assessments

- Set expectations from the start. Describe the motivation behind the assessment and be transparent about what the goals are (and what they are not).
- Outline when to expect assessments and the role they play in contributing to program creation, revision, and sustainability.
- Clarify expectations for involvement and whether/how contributing relates to program progression.
- When possible, provide examples of how previous cohorts' feedback has shaped program revision.

During any assessments

- Be clear about any deadlines, length of assessments, and how data will be used.
- Respect everyone's time by keeping measures short and closely aligned with program goals.

Following any assessments

- Acknowledge efforts made on the assessment. Gratitude could be included in ongoing communication already established with the community (at department meetings, emails, social media, posters, or newsletters, etc.).
- Bring in de-identified highlights or themes that students provided in their feedback ("I saw many of you had questions about [topic/process] and I want to follow-up on that by...")

The purpose of assessment can also be to **disseminate high-level information** with key stakeholders. This includes formal reports to funders or school administration as well as social media posting to promote programs to students.

Questions?

We are here to help



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Appendix A: Collaborative Assessment Model

The Collaborative Assessment Model (Bathgate & Claydon, 2021) characterizes the work of the Educational Program Assessment team at the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning. This model is based on four guiding principles and describes patterns in project partnerships between assessment professionals and campus partners.





Appendix B: Additional Resources

Information on setting goals that are SMART

- **Yale support for SMART goals:** <https://your.yale.edu/hit-mark-when-you-set-smart-goals>
- **Some history and research on SMART goals:**
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0149718916302580?via%3Dihub> <https://www.projectsart.co.uk/smart-goals/brief-history-of-smart-goals.php>

Better Evaluation Framework and Example Measures

- **Better Evaluation Website:** <https://www.betterevaluation.org/>
- **Framework & steps:** <https://www.betterevaluation.org/frameworks-guides/rainbow-framework>
- **Example evaluation and assessment methods:**
<https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/methods>

Survey Design Guidance

- **Survey design principles:**
 - <https://stripe.com/guides/atlas/survey-design-principles>
 - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/learn/survey-best-practices/>
- **Avoiding survey bias:**
 - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/how-to-avoid-common-types-survey-bias/>
 - <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/research/survey-bias/>
- **Considerations for validity:**
 - <https://helpfulprofessor.com/types-of-validity/>