Developing data collection instruments from scratch can be a difficult and time consuming undertaking. Fortunately, in many social service sectors, there are existing data collection instruments that you may be able to use as they are or adapt to suit your own needs. This document discusses some issues to consider about existing tools, followed by a list of databases of data collection instruments that are available on the Web.

Before using instruments that someone else developed, it is important to consider several things:

- **Is the instrument appropriate for your purpose?** Before adopting or adapting an existing instrument, review it carefully to make sure that the questions it asks or the experiences it examines are the same that you are interested in measuring. It may be that only part of the instrument will work for your purposes. You may need to add questions of your own to get at the information you require.

- **Is the language appropriate for your audience?** Make sure that the language used in the instrument or questions is appropriate for your purposes. A survey developed to gauge civic engagement attitudes among college-age students will probably not work as well with students in high school, for example. You may need to change the language in order to make it most appropriate, or you may want to consider looking for an instrument that was developed specifically for the type of individuals you are interested in collecting data from.

- **Have you given credit where credit is due?** If you are using an existing data collection instrument or parts of it, make sure you give appropriate credit to the source. Most of the websites provide guidance on how best to do this.

- **Have you tested the instrument?** As with all data collection instruments, it is best to test the instrument with a smaller sample of

respondents and make modifications before administering it to everyone.

Online Databases
of Existing Data Collection Instruments

Compendium of Assessment and Research Tools (CART)

http://cart.rmcdenver.com/

> This database provides instruments that measure attributes associated with youth development programs. The website includes thorough descriptions of various tools, research instruments, and guides for those who are interested in evaluating the effectiveness of school-based youth development activities.

Measures For Community Research Database

http://www.aspenmeasures.org/

> This is a collection of measures used to evaluate outcomes viewed as important by Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs), public policy makers, program funders, and experts in relevant research fields. The measures referred to on this website apply to the following topic areas: Community Building, Economic Development, Employment, Education, Housing and Neighborhood Conditions, Neighborhood Safety, Social Services, and Youth Development. The site features descriptions of primary data collection instruments, interview protocols, and self-assessment guides.

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) Out-of-School Time (OST) Program Evaluation Database © 2004 President and Fellows of Harvard College
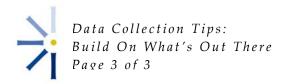
http://gseweb.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/evaldatabase.html

> A compilation of profiles written by HFRP of evaluations of OST programs and initiatives. This database provides accessible information about evaluation work on both large and small OST programs to support the development of high quality evaluations and programs in the OST field.

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) Assessment Index

http://www.character.org/resources/assessment/

> CEP is a nonpartisan coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in our nation's youth as one means of creating a more compassionate and responsible society. The assessment index catalogues assessment instruments by variable. Their website links to a list of selected literature for each topic area.

Project Star

http://www.projectstar.org/star/Library/New%20Library.htm

> This is an AmeriCorps State/ National Direct website. It provides users with links to sample data collection tools by topic area. Topics include Community Strengthening, Health, Literacy, Member Development, Environment, Tutoring, Youth Activities, and Mentoring.

Americans For The Arts/ Youth Arts

http://www.americansforthearts.org/youtharts/appendices/appendix24/

> Information on how to develop and administer arts knowledge surveys.

We hope you found this document useful and informative.
For more tools and resources for nonprofit program planning and evaluation, please contact us or visit our website.