How to test data collection tools

When conducting impact measurement there are a variety of different ways you can test your tools to make sure that they accurately and consistently collect what you intend them to measure. There are statistical tests you can use to assess the validity and reliability of your tools, but even more basic testing can help ensure the tools are fit for purpose. We have included guidance to the right on how to conduct basic testing.

We go into more detail on the tips to the right, including exceptions when these tips might not apply, in our Impact measurement and management (IMM): Builder eLearning course:

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There are a number of ways you can conduct basic tests of your data collection tools:

1. **Piloting the tool by collecting data from a group of your intended respondents and reviewing the data that emerges.**
2. **The respondents testing the tool could also be consulted to see how they found answering the questions, their preferences, and any issues they think could emerge.**
3. **Asking someone with knowledge of the respondents to review the data collection tool.**

What to look out for when testing

- Whether respondents **understand the questions**. This is easier to determine in open questions but could be picked up on closed questions if the results are surprising and indicate a lack of understanding, or through consulting with the respondents piloting the tools. Recording the number of missed responses or 'I don't know' answers for each question can also establish which may be unclear or poorly explained.
- Whether the **wording of the questions causes offence** and is appropriate for the respondents; this could be checked through consultation with respondents.
- The **length of the tool** and whether there are too many questions. Are respondents getting bored and frustrated as they get to the end of completing a tool or towards the end of an interview or focus group?
- **Completion rates:** if you are testing with a wider group you can also look at how many complete the tool or finish the process of providing data.
- **Response rates** can also be helpful to review how many missing responses are there in the tool where questions have not been answered? This could also relate to a focus group or interviews where a respondent is less keen to answer a question.
- **Response times** can be useful to explore in online questionnaires. I can be useful to look at the different response times for the whole tool and question by question.
- Next, in relation to closed questions, did respondents feel that the **response options were sufficient**? Is the 'other' box ticked more than expected in questionnaires?
- If consulting with your group of respondents piloting the tool, you can look at **whether the introduction to the tool is sufficient** and whether it anticipated their questions about the process. We look in more detail at how to introduce a data collection tool in the next module.