

## Strengthening Your Reentry Program Evaluation Through Primary Data Collection Transcript

Christine Lindq...: ... Your reentry program evaluation through primary data collection. I'd like to start with a couple of housekeeping items. This webinar is being recorded, and all attendees have been automatically muted. We do encourage you to take advantage of the chat and Q and A features. Whatever you put in the chat will be seen by all attendees unless you select just the panelists, and items that you put in the Q and A, just go to the panelists. We will try to monitor both the chat and the Q and A in real time to answer your questions as they come up. And then we have time set aside for questions at the end.

We have four presenters today. I am Christine Lindquist from RTI, and I direct the Evaluation and Sustainability Training and Technical Assistance Project or ES TTA, which I will tell you more about in just a minute. I'm joined by my colleague, Dr. Sam Scaggs, who is an ES TTA coach for this project. We are also happy to be joined by Dr. Michael Campagna and Dr. Ryan Spohn from the Nebraska Center for Justice research, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Just to give you a little background about the ES TTA project, this is a BJA funded TTA project, led by RTI in partnership with the Center for Court Innovation. We provide intensive training and technical assistance to a subset of Second Chance Act grantees, to help them conduct more rigorous evaluations that lead to data driven program improvement and demonstrated impact, and that support programs long-term sustainability. In addition, we produce evaluation and sustainability products that are available to the entire reentry field for anyone looking for tools to help them more rigorously evaluate and sustain their programs. All of our products are posted on the NRRC website, and the best way to find them is to go to topics and then select evaluation and sustainability.

As an overview of today's webinar, I will first be providing some context on why primary data collection among reentry populations might be needed for rigorous evaluation. And to make sure we're on the same page, by primary data we mean new data that a researcher needs to collect firsthand, such as by administering interviews, surveys or focus groups. And for the purposes of this webinar, we define reentry populations as program participants or clients who are incarcerated, formerly incarcerated or reentering. And also similar individuals who may be serving as a comparison or control group for evaluation purposes. And then after that context, my colleague Sam will

provide some tips on how to get started with a primary data collection effort. These guidelines are based on a resource brief that our ES TTA project just developed on this topic, and I'm going to include a link to that brief in the chat. So this is publicly available on the NRRC website, and you can feel free to access this. And then finally, Ryan and Michael will share some of their on the ground experiences with primary data collection as a research partner for two Second Chance Act grantees.

So why would primary data collection be needed in a reentry program evaluation? It's necessary for a couple of reasons. First, sometimes the outcomes you need to be able to look at are not available from an existing data source. It's pretty easy to get data for outcomes like rearrest or reincarceration from existing data sources. But outcomes like housing stability, substance use, or mental health status are not typically available from an existing data source. And sometimes these outcomes are available for some people in your study populations, such as the treatment group or Second Chance Act participants, but they may not be available for everyone in your evaluations, such as the comparison group that you're going to be comparing outcomes for your treatment group against. And the second reason is that your evaluation may want to document program participants' perceptions of the program. This type of information can only be learned by asking the participants themselves. Examples are participant satisfaction with the program or their perceptions about whether the program met their needs. These are really important things to understand, and they usually require primary data collection because you can't get them from any other source.

So it can be daunting to get started with primary data collection, because there are so many decisions to be made and so many options to choose from. The next part of our presentation provides tips on how to get started, and it directs you to some resources that might help. The best practices we will be sharing are pulled from RTI's experience conducting large, federally funded, multi-site evaluations of reentry programs. We focus on five key decision points. First, determining what data need to be collected and from whom. Secondly, determining the timing of your primary data collection effort. Third, determining the best mode of data collection. Fourth, designing your data collection instrument. And finally developing and implementing data collection protocols. So with that framing, I will turn this presentation over to Sam, who will share some high level recommendations for each decision point.

Dr. Sam Scaggs: Thank you, Chris. And good afternoon, everyone. So a critical first step to designing a primary data collection effort is determining what data need to be collected. And by this we mean the specific constructs or topics that need to be measured for program participants, and if relevant, comparison group members. So to get started, you'll want to clearly specify the key research questions that need to be answered in the evaluation. These research questions could include both outcome focused and process focused activities. Next you'll want to specify what constructs need to be measured to address your research questions, and the populations for which each construct is needed. Typically, population can mean program participants, comparison group members, or both program participants and comparison group members. Once you've mapped out your data needs at this high level, you'll want to identify any existing data already available on the constructs through a data assessment.

For some constructs, you won't have any existing data available. And for others you might have available data for only program participants, or you might be fortunate enough to have available data for both your treatment and your comparison group members. Finally, based on the data assessment, you'll identify any primary data that need to be collected to fill in the gaps you identified. Note that this step might reveal the need to refine certain research questions, because they just can't realistically be addressed even with the new data collection effort. And through an iterative process, you'll end up with a final set of research questions that you can clearly answer by your evaluation.

So for this slide I wanted to provide some examples of the second step, which is to identify constructs and populations based on research questions. So for an example, research questions such as did the program reduce criminal thinking for program participants? A key construct here would be criminal thinking, and the population for which data on the construct are needed would be program participants. Another research question might be did the program improve recidivism, employment and housing outcomes for program participants compared to comparison group members? The key constructs here are recidivism, employment and housing. And the population for which data would need to be collected is both program participants and comparison group members. And as a third example, how satisfied with the program were participants? Were different types of participants equally satisfied with the program? The key constructs in these questions are satisfaction and demographics, and the population for which data on constructs need to be collected are program participants only.

So once you have a general understanding of the type of data you'll need to collect to be able to address the research questions, you'll want to determine the appropriate timing of your data collection effort. Which can pertain to individual study sample members, as well as the overall data collection schedule. So first, the time points for individual study sample members often reflect their stage in the criminal justice system, such as their incarceration date, program, enrollment date, or their release date. This approach provides a standardized reference point for all sample members, and allows findings to be framed in an intuitively meaningful way. Ideally decisions about timing for the study sample members will be based on the reentry program service model, or whether pre and post release services are delivered, the timing of those services and the length of the program. Second, the population being served. Whether it's a reentering population or post release population.

And then third, the research questions. So do you need to assess change over time, or study participants long-term reentry experiences? In some cases, multiple time points might be needed, depending on your research questions, your evaluation design and your available budget. For example, some research questions might seek to compare short and long term outcomes for program participants and comparison group members. And others might seek to assess pre and post program changes in attitudes or beliefs among program participants, with both of these scenarios requiring multiple data collection time points. When making decisions about the ideal timing of data collection for individual sample members, it's critical to map out what the different scenarios being considered would mean for the overall schedule for data collection. And finally, in making decisions about the timing of data collection for individuals in the overall data collection schedule, it can be extremely helpful to develop a timeline that lays out the timing of program enrollment program, service delivery, as well as the planned evaluation data collection schedule.

So the example timeline in this figure, which is included in our resource brief, shows a four year grant funded program that includes a planning year in three years of service delivery, with each program participant receiving six months of services. The timeline mapping process might lead an evaluator to rule out certain data collection scenarios because they just aren't feasible given time constraints. And in this case, mapping two waves of interviews against the program enrollment and service delivery period might lead the evaluator to modify the planned evaluation activities because the current timeline just doesn't allow for this. Also budgetary and practical considerations, such as the burden

on program and data collection staff, will also come into play when decisions are made about the number in the timing of data collection waves. If this is the case, it may be necessary to repeat the design mapping process and revise research questions, with the ultimate goal being to develop an evaluation plan that reflects realistic conditions.

The third decision point is determining your data collection mode. So this refers to the method or the approach for collecting data. In research program evaluations, the most common modes for collecting data include focus groups, individual interviews and self administered surveys. Focus groups are open ended discussions among a small number of participants, and are facilitated by a moderator who follows a semi-structured protocol. These groups traditionally take place in person, but they can also be administered virtually. And importantly focus group topics are usually not sensitive, and they'll pertain to participants' perceptions of a program as opposed to their individual behaviors or experiences.

Interviews entail an interviewer asking open-ended, close-ended, or maybe a combination of both types of questions of a respondent. They can take place in person, via telephone or virtually using video technology. Interview topics often cover individual's specific experiences, behaviors, and perceptions. They can leverage technological features such as computer assisted personal interviewing, or CAPI, which allows for complex skip or fill patterns to be programmed in the interview instrument. Audio computer assisted self interviewing, or CASI, is another example. And this allows respondents to use headphones to listen to pre-recorded questions and enter their own answers directly. Or there's also computer assisted telephone interviewing, or CATI, which allows the respondents to listen to the pre-recorded questions, and again enter answers directly.

Both the CASI and CATI are often used for particularly sensitive questions to avoid respondents having to disclose their answers to the interviewer. As a third mode, self administered surveys entail respondents answering questions themselves. These can be administered via pencil on paper, web application, or in some situations, text messaging. And survey topics often cover individual specific experiences, behaviors, and perceptions.

So to help researchers think through these decisions, the resource brief that Chris mentioned earlier includes a detailed table summarizing the advantages, disadvantages and considerations of focus groups, interviews, and self administered surveys. Now, I won't go through the content shown here, this is

just a screenshot of the focus group and interview summary. And it's mainly just to let you know the kind of detailed information available in the resource brief. But each mode has advantages and limitations that need to be factored into your decision. Decisions about the appropriate mode also depend on the constructs that need to be measured, including the sensitivity of the topics as I alluded to earlier. So with highly sensitive topics, such as intimate partner violence or drug use or a criminal involvement, these might be better suited to a mode that does not require disclosure to an interviewer.

Also, another factor is available budget for the data collection, with some modes being a little bit more expensive than others. Logistical considerations, such as the availability of staff to conduct interviews with sample members, and the availability of needed data collection technology or skills. Also, the decision must be based on the purpose of the collection, including whether individual level data need to be collected for each sample member. So for example, if outcomes need to be measured for each sample member, an interview or survey is needed. But if the purpose is to collect certain measures from only a sub sample of program participants, such as a process study seeking to learn about participants' impressions of a program, a focus group would be more appropriate.

So the fourth decision point is designing your data collection instrument. So this is the set of actual survey or interview, or focus group questions that will be asked, with the final wording and the question order being considered. So to get started in designing your data collection instrument, you'll want to list the key constructs for questions that need to be developed. And it can be very useful to organize constructs by domains or higher level groupings. So that domains may reflect conceptual topics such as demographics or perceptions of the program, or the reference period such as pre release experiences versus post release experiences. And at this stage, you may want to develop a tentative order in which domains will logically be covered.

Once you have this high level outline, you'll want to identify possible items or scales which you can think of as sets of items that are intended to measure an underlying construct. And to save time you might want to select or adapt existing items, which might be of higher quality than if you were to develop original items from scratch. Many existing survey or interview items or scales are freely available for anyone to use. And these can typically be found in internet searches or in published materials from previous reentry evaluations.

With that being said, to help you get started, the Evaluation and Sustainability Training and Technical Assistance project team has developed a compendium of these items, which can be found in a 75 page appendix in our resource brief on this topic. And I'll show you some screenshots of this appendix in just a minute. But just to move on, when considering existing items, you should review any documentation about the population for which the item or the scale was developed. So you might want to consider the literacy level, demographic characteristics or criminal justice status. And also the process used to develop the item per scale, including whether it was pretested.

You'll want to select measures that have established validity and reliability if possible. So validation traditionally refers to validating a self-reported measure, such as self-reported drug use, against an existing gold standard measure, such as a drug test result covered in the same reference period. Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. So whether over time in a test retest approach with in measure reliability, with internal consistency, or between raters, which is what we refer to as inter rater reliability. After compiling potential existing items or scales, consider which ones seem the most appropriate for your population and whether any adaptations might be needed, either for the question itself or the response options that are used. Common adaptations in reentry studies include modifications to the reference period to make it more suitable to the timing of your data collection. An example of this might be changing a reference period from within the past six months to since you were released. While these changes are generally acceptable, they may not be appropriate for existing scales that require specific reference period.

Also, I think it's important to be mindful that adaptations like this might reduce the reliability of a given scale. And if you are unable to find existing items or scales for constructs that need to be covered in your data collection instrument, you will definitely need to develop your own items and response options. And when developing new items, consider pretesting them with individuals who are similar to your target population. This process is typically extremely helpful in identifying problems with the items, such as unclear terms or confusing response options as a few examples. And these can be resolved through additional modifications to the final items after the pretesting phase.

When putting together the final data collection instrument, you may want to refine the question ordering to ensure a logical flow for the respondent, in terms of the reference periods and topics, and to factor in considerations regarding the sensitivity of items.

The final instrument will also need to reflect mode specific decisions or notations, such as clarification on the format of response options. And so as an example of this, questions might be open ended such that respondents answered the question in a free form manner, or they could be close ended where respondents select from one or more predetermined response options.

A second consideration is instructions for skip patterns. So skip patterns pertain in a manner in which respondents are routed through the instrument on the basis of how they answered a previous question. And the third consideration is interviewer instructions. So interviewer administered data collection for this data collection approach, be sure the final data collection instrument includes any relevant instructions for interviewers. These include when to read the response options out loud, or allow respondents to answer on their own, what probes might be used if respondents have difficulty answering a question, or when show cards displaying response options or other data collection materials, such as reference calendars, are meant to be used. So here are some examples of interview domains and constructs from the compendium in our resource brief. Here you can see we have constructs for demographics and background characteristics, housing and employment, and income domains. Many other domains and constructs are included in the full compendium.

So here are some examples of specific interview questions in the housing domain. Again, the compendium might be a great resource for you, because you can take any of these items and use them in developing your own data collection instrument. So the final step in preparing for a primary data collection effort is to design and implement your data collection protocols. So these are the specific procedures outlining how your primary data collection effort will be implemented. So for studies that are reviewed by an institutional review board, or IRB, which is required if the activities classified as human subjects research, a detailed protocol outlining procedures for selecting a sample, recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent, collecting data, protecting confidentiality of that information, and then also securing data is typically required in these protocols.

Studies that aren't required to have IRB oversight may not need this level of specificity, but will still need to make decisions about these aspects of data collection and develop data collection materials, such as consent forms and recruitment materials. Key aspects of data collection that should be incorporated in your study protocols include strategies designed to protect human subjects, and other strategies for increasing



participation and improving data quality. So any primary data collection effort with reentry population should be designed to reflect common requirements for ensuring strong human subjects protections. So reentering citizens are a vulnerable population because they are typically under criminal justice supervision, and they face constraints in making voluntary decisions about participating in research. They may be subject to punitive consequences from the justice system that their data were disclosed through a breach of confidentiality. And so therefore careful attention to ensuring that their participation in your primary data collection effort is truly voluntary and avoiding any coercion, and that their data are kept private and confidential is extremely important.

Here are some key recommendations for following these guidelines. To help ensure that participants in a research study make a truly voluntary decision about their participation, make sure that reentry program staff and any correctional partners who may come into contact with your study participants are informed that the primary data collection effort is completely voluntary, and agree to refrain from any activities that could potentially be coercive. Potential respondents must have the right to make their own decision about whether to participate or not. And no harm or benefit should result from their decision, including any impact on their criminal justice status, or the services or treatment they receive. And typically in agreement between a research team and a correctional agency on these terms can be formally specified in a memorandum of understanding.

You also want to administer an informed consent form to all study participants, which provides sufficient information to potential research subjects to allow them to make a voluntary decision as to whether or not to participate. And this form will describe topics covered and purpose of the data collection effort, the mode, the time commitment, and how their data will be used and protected. It should also discuss any limits to the confidentiality that the researcher can provide, such as any information disclosed about child abuse or neglect, or a planned escape from a correctional facility, or potential criminal involvement. And so to ensure that data collected are kept private and confidential, we recommend practices such as ensuring the privacy of the data collection effort by conducting any interviews or focus groups in a private location where no one can overhear the conversation. Also, keep respondent's data secure by following standard confidentiality procedures regarding the collection of personally identifiable information, such as

collecting it only if it is essential for the study, and the secure transfer storage, and disposal of this information.

Finally, make sure that any staff involved in the data collection effort are trained on the study protocols, and that procedures are in place to ensure that the protocols are followed. Some studies have staff sign a pledge indicating that they are aware of confidentiality protocols and agree to follow them. So in addition to protecting study's participants, data collection protocols should be designed to collect the highest quality data and ensure high response rates among all prospective participants. And for studies involving multiple ways of data collection, encourage high retention rates. So for this, you want to explore the possibility of providing incentives for participation to offset the time, and in some cases travel or other costs required for participating in the data collection activity.

Many Departments of Corrections do not allow people who are incarcerated to receive payment for research activities, and BJA grants cannot be used for incentives, including monetary incentives or stipends as well as meals, gift cards or prizes. However, other funding agencies may not have this restriction, and other sources of funding such as gift cards donated by local businesses should be explored to encourage participation among sample members who are not incarcerated.

For data collection efforts that involve interviewers or other data collection staff, considering those who have backgrounds similar to those of your study participants, including those with lived experience, perhaps they're from the same neighborhoods or with similar demographics. These staff will likely develop a stronger rapport with potential participants, resulting in higher participation rates and better data quality. Be sure to provide plenty of training and support for all data collection staff, and consider any background clearances that may be required for data collection in correctional facilities.

For data collection efforts that involve multiple waves, implement special procedures to ensure that you can locate respondents at the follow up interviews. Many longitudinal studies with reentering populations struggle with attrition, or the loss of cases during follow up data collection points. And this is because respondents move, they may become homeless, or they have inconsistent telephone service. To mitigate these possibilities, use the baseline interview to obtain contact information not only for the respondent, but also for family members or friends who will know how to find the sample member at the next interview. But also be sure to obtain the

participants' permission to reach out to these contacts. Also consider strategies for maintaining contact with study participants between waves, such as checking in with them via text, phone, or email.

And for more information on our resource brief on protecting the confidentiality of participant data, please see our ES TTA resource brief on the topic. And with that, I think we can open it up for questions if anybody had any at this point.

Okay. So if there aren't any questions, I think I can hand it back over to Chris.

Christine Lindq...: Yeah. Thank you, Sam. And feel free to enter any questions that come to mind in either the Q and A or the chat, and we'll try to answer those as they come in. And also, we have time set aside for more additional questions and answers at the end. So next we're going to hear from Ryan and Michael, who're going to share some real world experiences collecting data for Second Chance Act program evaluations.

Dr. Michael Cam...: Thank you, Christine. Welcome everyone from the Great Plains. My name is Dr. Michael Campagna, and I'm a research associate here at the Nebraska Center for Justice Research. I am joined with Dr. Ryan Spohn, my director. Our portion of this presentation is titled primary data collection and reentry evaluations, with real world applications, challenges, and recommendations. And we'll be drawing from our experiences collecting primary data on reentry evaluation projects. This is an outline of our portion of the presentation. We're going to introduce that research center, and some the collaboration BJA funded projects. We're going to look at a little bit into data collection using mixed methods, talk about sampling bias, and then examine some outcomes that are not just recidivism and provide some conclusions.

Okay. A little bit about our research center. Okay. We have four researchers and some staff support at our center. We were established in 2014, and primarily focus on the adult system with some juvenile crossover work. Most of our focus recently has been in reentry and corrections, and other similar topics. We try to provide evidence based practices to our local agencies, and any federal grants and contracts that may come across our desk. And we are housed at the University of Nebraska, Omaha's nationally ranked Criminology and Criminal Justice Program.

So we're currently working on two BJA grants. The first one is based in Iowa, titled Achieving Change Together. And it's a very

interesting project to try to collect data on individuals. But we also are working with the Nebraska Board of Parole BJA grant, which developed a novel program to those reentering in the community. And with that, I will turn it over to Ryan for the next few slides.

Dr. Ryan Spohn: Thank you, Mike. So we're going to talk a little bit about some of our primary data collection methods. And in almost all the evaluation that we do, including our evaluation of reentry programs, we tend to adopt a mixed method approach, and we specifically do this for our large scale reentry evaluations. Mixed method approaches generally include both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. And just very briefly, as you've heard some discussion thus far, qualitative methods include conducting interviews or focus groups, transcribing the conversation and then searching for meaningful patterns and themes in the data. And generally that's a method of primary data collection, the focus today. Quantitative methods can be both primary data and secondary data collection. So surveying reentry clients using Likert type scales would be one example of primary data collection. Retrieving data on returns from prison from a Department of Corrections database, or any other official measures of recidivism, such as arrest, conviction. Those would also be quantitative methods, but those would fall in the category of secondary data collection.

So why do we tend to use mixed method approaches? And not only do we think it's good practice, but we often find that this is what our stakeholders look for. So first invariably, when we're working with stakeholders and we're in the community doing community engaged research, some of those stakeholders want to see the numbers, they make it very clear. And largely this is because they know what data is collected, that's what can make a change. Also, quantitative data is often seen as more objective and perhaps more generalizable. We can see when the numbers go up, when they go down, and those can be generalized to maybe statewide projections or projections over time. Other stakeholders always want to hear the stories, they're more interested in qualitative approaches. So they want to hear the stories of individuals, perhaps that are the people reentering into the community, they want to hear the stories from the staff members and the practitioners that are working with these individuals. So in order to appease both of those populations, we find it useful to use mixed methods and provide both.

Second, quantitative data in our evaluations most often focuses on long term outcomes, such as recidivism. This doesn't always have to be the case, but most federally funded reentry

evaluations do want you to look at recidivism, and that's something that tends to happen later on in the grant period. Whereas interviews and focus groups can occur in earlier stages of the project. So you heard Sam talking about timing, and having his chart showing that different evaluation activities occur at different times. And we find in most of our projects that this is a really, really nice balance. That we can be doing more of the qualitative interview and focus group work towards the beginning of the project. And as a project moves through the stages of implementation, so maybe early implementation to full implementation, the information that we're getting from that qualitative research can help inform the implementation, and address challenges and barriers as they're occurring in earlier stages so improvements can be made.

Number three, qualitative methods are useful for assessing the process of an initiative, or a process of quality assurance. So examples, how is this program helping you to stay sober? So the things that individuals administering the program may think are most important, may not be the things that the participants believe are most important, or most helpful in their reentry process. So that's data that can be collected, and perhaps some changes need to be made as the program matures. What else could this program do to help you find a job? Just in the duration of the grants that we're working on right now, we've seen these immense changes in employment opportunities, in staffing, turnovers, these sorts of things.

So the way that the job market looks for these participants at the beginning of a grant may be different even maybe two or three years as the grant progresses. And then talking about quality assurance, or client or participant satisfaction, an example. If you could change one thing to improve this program, what would it be? That's an example of feedback that can occur earlier on in implementation, and maybe lead to improvements in the program.

And then finally, the qualitative data collected through primary data collection can provide information often that cannot be obtained through other methods. And that's something we often look for when working with our agencies. If there's information that we want to collect, if there's goals of the grant and there's not existing data, that's where we target the qualitative data in order to get measures that don't already exist. And I would just say in our evaluations, we tend to use all three of the modes of data collection that Sam mentioned that are also in the research brief. We do use online surveys, very useful particularly during

the pandemic conditions that we faced, and we conduct interviews and we conduct focus groups.

Okay, I'm going to turn it back over to Mike. And he's going to talk about issues of sample selection, bias, and methods for reducing its impact.

Dr. Michael Cam...: Thanks, Ryan. Okay. So in the context of reentry, bias is going to occur in non randomly assigned samples, very likely going to occur. The reason why that is because those who are likely to respond are typically somehow different from those who are less likely to respond, and keep in mind that collecting data on all participants is very uncommon in practical use. We often lose non completers to their real lives, to their new identities. They very often want to be completed with the system, they want to be done with the system they want to be on with their new identities. They may have experienced a great deal of trauma in the system, or prior to the system, and simply want to move on.

So contact with the agency slash grantee, or the evaluators is oftentimes unpreferable. Okay. To address sampling bias when you're reporting and potentially setting up your your study to be published in some fashion, your task is often to build an argument for why your study matters. And that means that you need to define your sampling frame and describe its context. In that way, you're not overgeneralizing or making claims that you can't support with evidence. This is a purposive sampling method, and it should not be stated as otherwise.

So, we find it very useful to use a reiterative sampling methodology, and I'm going to go through a few steps that we've identified that we commonly partake in. So in the sampling selection, first you want to determine if the partner or grantee understands why you're administering a survey. This is typically very important for buy-in, for the grantee or partner to be able to collaborate and provide you with referrals, to the participants, but also to other agencies and collaboratives that have been involved with the participants' reentry process. You really want to talk about who's going to take the survey and provide a logical justification for why you are selecting that subpopulation. Some examples are everyone who's enrolled in the program, everyone who's completed the program based on the program's criteria of what a completion is. Be sure not to subvert the criteria of the completer, of what the program or grantee believes is a completer, with your own definitions. But get that information from them, what is a completion? Who is eligible for a completion?

Another example would be all those who are eligible to take the program. That might be the most difficult out of those three, enrolled, completers or eligibles. That's the most, the eligibles is the most difficult to contact. You want to then develop a survey methodology, and Sam did a great job in describing some of these steps. We're just going to talk about our experiences here. Want to talk about what's going to be on the survey, you need to justify that with a logical argument or some type of evidence on what those survey constructs will be. When to administer the survey? Is it going to be 90 days after completion? Is it going to be prior to the start of the program? Both?, Or some other timeframe? How you're going to administer the survey is a collaborative process. You need to work with your grantee or partner to develop the procedures for how that's going to happen. And again, Sam went over some really great examples and recommendations that have shown to be helpful in improving how that is completed.

And eventually you want to tie everything to the interventions. Develop your research questions around the interventions and what they're designed to change. And then after that, before you administer the survey, you really want to circle back to review the sample selection, to ensure that who you are identified as who's going to take the survey will still make sense. Okay. We have a question in the question and answers section, and Christine has answered it. Thank you, Christine. Okay.

So to give a little bit more structure to this method of sampling, and getting some information on participants. Looking at first, do the research partners and practitioners understand what the primary goals of the evaluation are? We've found in multiple evaluations that this is not so evident to the partners or practitioners. That may seem odd to evaluators, but certainly something that you need to gently review with your partners and practitioners. Which concepts are you going to be capturing? And Sam did a fantastic job at describing some of those and how that would be measured. Who's going to be the participants that you are selecting to collect information on? And then when, for each who or what, will the data be collected. That gets a little complicated, and so drawing it out visually for the visual learners is very easy to present to practitioners, but also to understand it yourself. Okay. And then again, how is the data going to be collected, and how will it be used to improve your evaluation?

So just some example answers to these questions. So when I say marginally, I mean maybe not so direct from our experience, directly explaining this is sometimes offensive to a partner or practitioner. But generally they're adults, so you could do it that

way, but we recommend doing it softly. Explaining that the program's being examined for an impact, and what that means in non evaluation speak, but in plain language. Then the example is to examine quality of life measures as an outcome. I didn't see that on Sam's list, but this is another one that's just a construct that hasn't been given yet. It's something that, from our partners and grantees, that we've seen a lot of interest in, quality of life measures. And that may be an avenue for the future.

So they're completing a quality of life scale for participants two weeks prior to the program, and 90 days after program completion. That's the answer for number four there, and how they're going to be doing it, and who's going to be doing it. Participants will be given a short, structured interview conducted by a staff member and by a staff member, that could be one of the staff from the evaluation team or staff member from the agency or organization that you're working with. With that, I will Turn back over to Ryan.

Dr. Ryan Spohn: [inaudible 00:47:37] Yeah. So we want to talk a little bit about outcomes and assistance, and there's a really neat resource that I've taken a lot from. That's a new resource that we have cited here from the National Institute of Justice, desistance from crime implications for research policy and practice. And I'm told that is posted on the Second Chance Month website, it's also available from the NIJ. But in looking at modern research and theory on desistance, we're trying to look at desistance as a more complex and nuanced process than simply a yes, no measure of recidivism, such as returns to prison.

So that returns to prison measure is popular because it's a single measure, it's well understood, most jurisdictions have tracked that over time for a number of years or decades. And it has a fairly high rate of generalizability, you can compare Iowa to Nebraska for instance, the two states that we work in. But it is just a yes, no measure, it's very simple. And we argue, as well as others, that it doesn't really get at the full process of what reentry programs are trying to do, and we hear that all the time in our work here on the ground. So a definition that comes from that report of what the more nuanced idea that we might want to look at is desistance is the process by which criminality, or the individual risk for anti-social conduct, declines over the life course.

So just some ideas about desistance. It's unlikely to be uniform, smooth, or reversible. So somebody can desist for a while and then become active in crime again. And this is very consistent with the traditional life course theory of crime, that people can



stop their criminal behavior, but then they can start up again. Returns to prison we argue is a very coarse measure of success or failure. There's so many things that the agencies that we work with are trying to do to assist in the reentry process that may not be directly related to a return to prison. Maybe indirectly related. So the delivery of a college course, for instance. We know that education is correlated with reductions in recidivism, or reductions in participation in crime to begin with. But can we say that the delivery of a college course will directly impact returns to prison? That's a bit of a stretch.

And we argue that if you compare, use an example, of a health measure. If we used a binary measure of health that simply captures alive or dead, we might argue that there's a whole lot of health outcomes that are very important to us in our daily lives, that fall in between those two coarse or broad categories. So we argue that our outcome measures for reentry should be multiple, so there shouldn't be just one. To the extent that they can, they should be continuous. As we said, somebody can desist from crime, but then their criminal career can begin again. So continuous measures tend to be better. We would like to integrate some measures that are less biased by system actions. So arrests, convictions, reincarceration, all of those are strongly influenced by system actions and are less reflective of individual behaviors, which are the things that the reentry programs tend to be focused on.

And when at all possible, we would like to focus on strength based measures. Obviously return to prisons are the bad things, you screwed up. But what are some of the positive things that are being influenced by our reentry agencies? We're very interested in that as well. And we argue that more holistic measures of reentry success often depend on primary data collection. The primary topic today is they're not readily available in administrative data. So just some of the things that can be looked at in addition to returns to prison. Mike mentioned quality of life, we have a number of those scales with some of our agencies. Employment is obviously a focus of many of the federally funded grants, attending and completing programming, and getting those certificates and having those graduations from those programs. Perhaps paying child support, or maintaining or developing family relationships, securing stable housing is another example.

And just a little bit about the process. So we recommend adopting as many short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes as possible. Again, the long-term outcome is almost always return to prison or new crime. Part of this is due to timing. So if you can be gathering some of those short term and

intermediate outcomes while you're waiting for one year recidivism, or two or three year recidivism, these should be driven by program goals. As Mike mentioned, what are the goals of the funder? What are the goals of the reentry agency? What are the methods we want to adopt? So of all the things that we've been talking about today, what things are feasible and desired? What are the resources available for data collection? We mentioned that some of these methods can be very expensive. Interviews, focus groups, and then transcribing them and coding them is very time intensive. Resources may or may not be available.

What is the duration of the project or funding? So if it's a shorter project, you need to have more short term or intermediate outcomes. If you have three or four years, then maybe you can put more of a focus on the longer term recidivism outcomes. And what is the data sharing availability? So are you able to get a lot of administrative data? Does that administrative data meet your needs in evaluating your program? And to the extent that you're not able to make those agreements, or you have agreements there but the data just doesn't really capture a lot of your outcomes, then that's when you need to do more primary data collection. And this whole process involves a lot of collaboration and negotiation between reentry agencies and the research evaluation partners, and needs to happen as early as possible when a collaboration is conceived.

So finally, we'll return it back to Mike for our conclusions. Actually, I'll go ahead. I guess I'm doing the conclusion, sorry. So as we talked about, we recommend mixed methods for process measures and outcome measures when possible. And primary data collection is a method for collecting essential data that you may not be able to find in existing administrative data sources. As Mike mentioned, we need to keep sample bias in mind when we do primary data collection, because the factors that affect criminality also influence the individuals that we are able to collect data from, whether or not we can track them down or not. And put simply sample bias, can invalidate evaluation findings. It can have an undue influence over who we get information from and who we do not, and reduce our objectivity and generalizability.

Finally no measure of desistance is perfect, and return to prisons, we argue, is one good measure but it's inadequate in getting at the totality of what we might consider to be desistance, or a lack of recidivism. And primary data collection allows hopefully more multiple and holistic measures to be examined. So that's what we have today. I will turn it back to Christine.

Christine Lindq...: Okay, great. I wanted to draw your attention to one of the attendees questions, which is directly related to what you just presented. The question was, what are the quality of life scales that you have used? Do you think you could speak to that briefly? And then we'll take a look at the other questions.

Dr. Ryan Spohn: Do you know the names of them?

Dr. Michael Cam...: So most of the quality of life skills scales that we have used in the past, and are currently using, have been developed either by the partner or agency or ourselves. And so there aren't many out there that aren't extremely commercialized. There's a lot of commercial ones that you can get. But I advise, if you like to develop surveys, to develop one for yourself and collaborate with your partnering agency to determine its content and its applicability to their intervention and what they want to get out of the project. Is this what quality of life looks like in your population or jurisdiction, or region of the country?

Christine Lindq...: Okay, thank you. And I jumped the gun a little bit with a link that I put in the chat. I was trying to include some lead text on some RTI studies. We have used the CDC's health related quality of life measure, and that is publicly available. And it's a pretty standardized validated scale, but that's only one aspect of quality of life. And that has to do with how you feel in terms of your health, and how many days you have limitations on what you can do. So I definitely agree with that point about figuring out what makes sense for your program in terms of the outcome the program is trying to affect, and then looking for a scale that seems to reflect that. Okay.

Another ... Well, one quick and easy question we can answer is whether the recording and transcript is going to be available, and the answer is yes that should come out in May. And I don't know if the recording is going to be sent to everyone who participated in the panel today, or if it's going to just be posted on the NRRC website. But yes, the transcript and recording and archive slides from today's presentation will definitely be publicly available. And then I wanted to summarize another question that was submitted to the panelist in the Q and A, and that is whether we have a device on building an equivalent comparison group? I know during Sam's presentation, he mentioned your control or comparison group a couple of times, but we didn't really get into any of those details or provide recommendations.

And I will say that in doing reentry program evaluation, identifying a rigorous comparison group is probably the biggest challenge we face. We know that the gold standard is random

assignment because that eliminates any kind of selection bias. With a random assignment design, you basically take everyone who is eligible for the program and who has volunteered for the program, and you randomly assign half to get the program and half to get standard reentry planning. That eliminates all selection bias, but it's often not possible to implement in the real world.

So a couple of alternatives are what we call non equivalent comparison group designs. One of them might be a wait list design, and this is really good if your program has more eligible people than you do have slots to serve. So what you could do is put individuals who are interested in the program on a wait list, and then some portion of those individuals will never end up getting the program for various reasons, and they can serve as your comparison group. Or what you can do is what we call a matched comparison group design. And this is where you identify individuals who meet all of the program's eligibility criteria, but for various reasons that are not associated with selection bias, they were not offered the programming.

So it could be that you select individuals who are incarcerated in a facility other than the facilities where you're delivering your reentry program, and you run your screening criteria by these individuals, and then you consider them to be your comparison group. Or it could be individuals who are in the same facilities where you're delivering the reentry program, but maybe they're returning to a different community, so they're not eligible for the program because of that post release geographic criteria.

So those are some alternatives that you can consider. We often use post hoc statistical techniques, such as propensity score modeling to identify comparison group members. And I know that was a very brief summary, but I'm including a link to a resource that Sam actually developed. And in that resource, it takes you to a link to an animated graphic video on the same topic. But this is a very quick and easy summary of various comparison group designs when doing reentry program evaluations.

Okay. And that looks like there are a couple other questions. One is have your organizations, any of you know of, who partner with universities who are used as data collection partners? I don't know. Sam, do you want to maybe take this question to speak about partnerships with universities to have them involved in data collection based on your experience as an ES TTA coach? Have you seen this?

Dr. Sam Scaggs: Yeah, yeah. So we do have partners. So I work with one site that works with a professor from the University of North Carolina. And then we have Mike and Ryan from the Nebraska Center for Justice Research, they're affiliated with the University of Nebraska in Omaha. So I think, yeah we definitely know of several grantees that are working with either current on faculty. Some of them may be emeritus, so they're retired but they're still serving as a research partner. So we kind of have all different flavors of research partners that are affiliated with universities.

Christine Lindq...: Okay. And I see that in the chat, Meg Chapman indicated that the recordings of all webinars will be posted on the NRRC website in mid-May. It looks like there was also a question about peer support. I believe this is more of a programmatic question as opposed to an evaluation question, but Mike and Ryan, I'm curious to know if any of the programs that you are evaluating involve peer support.

Dr. Ryan Spohn: Yeah. We have a number of them. The most obvious one, and this isn't one of our BJA evaluations, but here in the state of Nebraska is a Mental Health Association. And the staff generally have experienced issues with mental health crises and were incarcerated, and so they serve as sort of peers even though they're now the staff, but they have that lived experience and they've been in that situation, but then they encourage that within the individuals. And they've set up a program where this occurs even before the reentry. So individuals that are incarcerated, they have a program that focuses on deescalation. That if somebody's having a crisis in the correctional facility, staff members can sometimes make that worse, particularly if they haven't had a lot of deescalation training. And so if it's a peer and you don't have those relationships of correctional officer to inmate, but as just somebody else who's in the facility with me that the deescalation goes a lot better.

You know of other examples in our programs? We have a lot of examples in our statewide reentry programs where the employees, the staff, are individuals that have lived experiences. Even directors of some of our reentry agencies have lived experiences. So it's not quite peer to peer but it sort of functions in that way, that it's individuals that have been through those same situations and those same experiences. But we certainly don't work with anything where the peer to peer sorts of things are the primary intervention, or a primary focus of the evaluation.

Dr. Michael Cam...: No, the only other example I could think of is a mentoring project where there's mentors still incarcerated working with people who

are about to reenter the community, or mentors on the outside who have formally been incarcerated.

Christine Lindq...: Okay. Thank you. I see we have a question about the distinction between juvenile and adult evaluations, and how that population difference may affect the recommendations that we're all providing. I will say that in the RTI's evaluation, which we did in partnership with the Urban Institute of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, that evaluation did include both adult and juvenile populations. So we certainly have experience collecting primary data with juveniles. The big factors are first, dealing with parental consent. For our studies, typically when we do data collection with juveniles who are in the juvenile justice system, our IRB does grant us a waiver of parental consent, but we have to focus on youth who are 16 and older because they really don't want us being involved in data collection without parental consent for youth who are younger than 16. Certainly when you develop your consent forms and your survey instruments, you need to pretest them and make sure that they are age appropriate, and that youth understand the questions.

And I know for our IRB when getting approval for the consent form that we used for juveniles, they had us actually include some extra questions where we would read a statement and we would say to the youth, "Okay, can you explain this in your own words?" to make sure that the youth actually understood what it was that they were consenting to.

So definitely there are some human subjects protection considerations that need to be factored in to make sure that youth really understand what it is that you're asking them to participate in, and that the wording of your questions is age appropriate. There are some constructs or domains that may be less relevant with you. So for example, experiences with employment may be less relevant, whereas experiences with family and peer behaviors could be more relevant. So I think it affects the types of questions you measure, but again that really gets back to designing your evaluation to reflect the outcomes that the program is actually intending to affect. So I think that goes hand in hand. Can any of the other panelists think of other key considerations that I overlooked when it comes to data collection with adults versus youth?

Dr. Ryan Spohn: The only thing I might mention would be reading level. Another thing that our IRB seems to focus on fairly clearly. So with adult populations, they might want us to have things at an eighth grade reading level, or maybe tenth grade. And if we're going to include juveniles, they might knock that down a little bit. Obviously

trying to match it to the grade levels of the youth that we're working with. But thinking about the at risk population, maybe even dropping it a little bit lower than what a more mainstream population, the expectations would be.

Christine Lindq...: Yeah, that's a good point. Okay. All right. I think we have answered all of the questions, I'm just scanning through to see if there's anything we overlooked. Okay. First, how may we find access to the resources that you've shared in this series? So I try to include all of those links in the chat here. And I don't know if the links to the resources are going to be archived in the transcript that comes from this webinar. So I suggest if there's something that we included that you're interested in, you go ahead and copy that link right here. All of the resources produced by the ES TTA team, including the resource brief that was the basis of the RTI part of the presentation, as well as the infographic on alternatives to random assignment and the how to protect confidentiality and data collection that Sam highlighted, those are all on the NRRC. And you can get to those by going to topics, and then evaluation and sustainability. The NIJ desistance report is also available on the NRRC website in addition to the NIJ website.

Okay. And then we have culturally ... I'm sorry, there is one more question that came in. We've also found that culturally contextual distinctions have been more prevalent in doing the assessments and evaluation too. Is that the findings that you have also experienced? I'm not ... Okay. So one additional resource that I would like to highlight is, the ES TTA team produced a resource on assessing and enhancing cultural responsiveness in reentry programs. So I'm going to go ahead and pull that out, but while I'm doing that, do any of the other panelists want to address this question based on your experience?

Dr. Michael Cam...: Well as far as within the sample that you're looking at, I haven't really delved into that very much and I don't think Ryan has either. But as far as across regions of the continent, yes. Definitely asking different types of questions in different ways, and presenting it to agencies and participants in different ways and how they collaborate, varies by region. For sure.

Christine Lindq...: And certainly when it comes to primary data collection, which was the focus of today's presentation, when it comes to developing your survey questions and developing rapport between an interviewer and respondents, I think there are a number of ways that cultural context really matters. And I think you really want to make sure that the questions you're asking

your sample members when you're collecting data, have been pretested with the population that you're actually going to be using them with. And making sure that they are easily understandable by all of the racial and ethnic groups, and other cultural groups that you have included in your evaluation. So I think that's really critical. And then in terms of data quality and getting open, honest answers, if you're engaging in person data collection with interviewers, I think hiring interviewers who reflect the demographic and cultural background of the study population that you're working with is also really critical for collecting high quality data.

And I do encourage you to check out this resource brief that I just posted in the chat, because that has a number of other ways that you can assess and enhance cultural responsiveness through your reentry program evaluation activities. And with that, I think we need to wrap up. Thank you so much for the questions that panelists have provided, that attendees have provided. And thank you so much to the other presenters in this panel. And please check back in [inaudible 01:12:27] on the NRRC website for the final recording of today's webinar. So thank you again for attending today, and for all the great questions, and good luck with your reentry evaluations and your program implementation as well. Have a great rest of your day. Thank you.

Dr. Ryan Spohn: I was looking to see if ... Do you want to save the event files?  
That's what I was wondering.