# **ESS Assessment – Assessment Methods Guidance**

## **Selecting an Assessment Method**

### **Identifying Assessment Type**

Your assessment method should be based on some key questions. The most important question is:

**What do you want to know?**

Ask yourself: *What outcome are you trying to assess, or what question are you trying to answer*? This will help you identify what type of assessment you are planning.

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| Are you… | Type of Assessment |
| Identifying participant needs? | “Needs Assessment” |
| Tracking program utilization or completion? | “Outputs Assessment” |
| Measuring participant satisfaction? | “Satisfaction Assessment” |
| Assessing learning or goal attainment? | “Outcomes Assessment” |
| Examining campus environments? | “Climate Assessment” |
| Reviewing a department or program? | “Program Assessment” |

### Recommended Assessment Methods

Once you have identified the type of assessment you are planning, consider the recommended assessment methods for that particular type of assessment:

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| Assessment Type | Recommended Assessment Methods |
| Climate  | Case Study, Focus Group, Survey |
| Needs  | Data Review, Document Analysis, Focus Group, Literature Review, Rubric, Survey |
| Outcomes  | Case Study, Data Review, Document Analysis, Portfolio, Reaction, Rubric, Survey |
| Outputs  | Data Review, Observation, Portfolio |
| Program  | Benchmarking, Data Review, Literature Review, Portfolio |
| Satisfaction  | Focus Group, Reaction, Survey |

### Other Methodological Factors

Other factors will further inform your choice of assessment method and how your assessment will be designed.

Two other key questions include:

* *What timeframe are you interested in assessing?*
* *How do you want to use the data you gather?*

### Assessment Timeframe

Ask yourself: *Are you trying to understand what is happening before a program starts, during a program, or after a program ends*?

**Assessment administered before a program starts: “*Pre-Assessment***”

* Useful for establishing baselines and identifying needs - consider benchmarking, data review, literature review, rubric, or survey

**Assessment administered during a program:** “***Formative Assessment***”

* Useful for gauging progress or understanding how something is going – consider document analysis, observation, reaction assessment, rubric, or survey

**Assessment administered after a program ends: “*Summative Assessment***”

* Useful for understanding outputs, outcomes, or how something went – consider data review, document analysis, focus group, rubric, or survey

### Assessment Design

Ask yourself: *Are you looking for specific information or broad feedback*?

For specific information:

* **“Direct Methods”** – participants display knowledge or outcome(s)
* **“Quantitative Methods”** – collect numerical data
* Consider data review, document analysis, rubric, or closed-ended survey

For broad feedback:

* **“Indirect Methods”** – participants reflect on knowledge or outcome(s)
* **“Qualitative Methods”** – collect non-numerical data
* Consider case study, focus group, or open-ended survey

### Other Design Considerations

* Whether you are seeking information about individuals, a specific group, or an entire population will also inform your methodology and design
* Not all questions fit neatly into a single type of assessment (e.g., a needs assessment may be part of a larger program assessment)
* Multiple forms of assessment may be required to answer certain questions (e.g., pre-assessment to determine baselines and summative assessment to measure outcomes)
* Many assessments will use mixed methods, and may include both direct/indirect or quantitative/qualitative components (e.g., a survey with closed-ended and open-ended items)
* The type and form of assessment, and type of method, will to some extent also be determined by current resources (including existing data) and constraints.

## **Overview of Assessment Methods**

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| **Benchmarking:** Using a standardized instrument to assess a program or institution relative to benchmarks or best practices for similar programs or institutions |
| **Strengths:*** Allows for comprehensive, objective assessment of program or institution
* Allows for direct comparisons relative to best practices and/or other institutions
* Standardized instrument requires minimal design or modification to implement
 | **Challenges:*** Process can be staff and time intensive
* Requires buy-in and support from program and/or institutional leadership
* Standardized instruments may not reflect the nuances or specifics of certain programs or institutions
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| **Planning questions:*** Do you have access to an appropriate standardized instrument? (CAS Self-Study recommended for program benchmarking for ESS programs)
* Do you have a designated individual or team for administering the assessment?
* Do you have access to necessary evidence for making comparisons (data benchmarks and/or program documents and resources)?
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| **Case Study:** A form of qualitative descriptive research, the case study looks intensely at an individual, program, institution, or event to assess needs, outcomes, etc. |
| **Strengths:*** More detail and depth to data
* Multiple perspectives are gathered
* Tells a story
* Very descriptive in nature
 | **Challenges:*** Takes significant time to gather and analyze data
* Narrow purpose for sharing data afterward
* Analysis can be time-consuming
* Resources may be needed to capture data
* Not meant to be generalizable
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| **Planning questions:*** How will you capture your data?
* Do you have a clear understanding what you are profiling and why?
* How will process and analyze your data?
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| **Data Review:** A systematic analysis of data collected for an institution, program, service, or population of students to assess needs, outputs, outcomes, and/or trends |
| **Strengths:*** Can leverage existing data to provide insight for further assessment and/or program improvements
* Can provide clear quantitative data points for analysis and reporting
* Can provide insight on a student population without requiring participation or response
 | **Challenges:*** Requires established data collection processes or implementing new data collection processes
* May not allow for establishing causal relationships
* Does not typically encompass broad, reflective feedback
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| **Planning questions:*** Are existing data collection processes in place? If not, do you have resources for implementing new data collection processes?
* How will you define specific data sources, specific measures (and corresponding items if needed), and appropriate collection and analysis methodologies?
* Does your data accurately reflect what you are attempting to assess?
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| **Document Analysis:** A form of qualitative research in which documents are used to give voice, interpretation, and meaning; documents may include application materials, student newspaper or publications, marketing materials, meeting minutes, strategic planning documents, etc. |
| **Strengths:*** Documents are readily available
* Documents are easily collected
* Documents are a stable data source (they don’t change)
* Can be collected on a quick timeline
 | **Challenges:*** Non-responsive in nature
* Documents are context-specific and language-specific
* Documents are often disconnected from their creator
* All documents are written through a lens, need to be aware of lens in order to assess objectivity
* Data analysis takes time
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| **Planning questions:*** How will you gain access to the documents?
* How will you analyze the documents?
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| **Focus Group:** Asking face to face open-ended questions in a group or one-on-one setting, with the intention to prompt discussion and reflection to assess climate, needs, satisfaction, etc. |
| **Strengths:*** Helps to understand needs, experiences, satisfaction, etc.
* Can be conducted with a relatively small number of participants
* Focus groups encourage group interaction and building upon ideas, yielding broad reflection
 | **Challenges:*** Recruiting participants
* Data collection and analysis are time consuming
* Beware of bias in analysis
* May not yield meaningful quantitative data
* Data is not meant to be generalizable
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| **Planning questions:*** How will you develop questions and protocols?
* What knowledge does the facilitator need of the population, program, or service?
* How will notes be taken?
* What logistics do you need to consider as far as finding space, etc.?
* Do you need consent forms?
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| **Literature Review:** A systematic review of published literature regarding needs and trends among a population of students and/or best practices for a program, service, or institution |
| **Strengths:*** Can provide broad insight on needs, trends, and best practices
* Can support program assessment without the need for a full benchmarking process
* Can provide insight on a student population without requiring participation or response
 | **Challenges:*** Data may not be generalizable to specific populations, programs, services, or institutions
* Insight gleaned through review provides general suggestions rather than specific recommendations
* Literature may be limited or unavailable for specific assessment questions
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| **Planning questions:*** Is an adequate volume of literature available to answer your assessment question(s)?
* How will you confirm the findings of available literature are applicable to your population, program, service, or institution?
* How will you track and analyze your findings?
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| **Observation:** A systematic method of collecting data through unobtrusive visual means (e.g., watching people or places) to assess utilization, usage patterns, behaviors, etc. |
| **Strengths:*** Unobtrusive – does not require participant engagement
* Often effective for assessing facility utilization and student trends
* Useful for gathering initial data to couple with survey or focus group
* Can provide both quantitative and qualitative data
 | **Challenges:*** Requires planning ahead (e.g., protocols, charts, journals)
* Non-responsive in nature
* Limited in the type of data it can collect
* Requires system for collecting data
* May require training observers
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| **Planning questions:*** What protocols will be used for making observations?
* Do you need to train observers?
* What is your timeline for collecting data?
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| **Portfolio:** A collection of artifacts or work that provide evidence of program outputs or outcomes, or evidence of student learning, development, or achievement |
| **Strengths:*** Shows progress over time
* Encourages meaningful reflection on progress
* Provides deep examples
* Provides multidimensional evidence of development
* Provides both individual and program-level feedback
* Can provide qualitative and quantitative data
 | **Challenges:*** Requires planning ahead (pre-determined outcomes, criteria for meeting outcome, experiences to be included, type of reflection, rating tool)
* Takes time to implement and see progress
* Need trained evaluators
* Depending on technology resources, combining aggregate may be time consuming
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| **Planning questions:*** Do you have outcomes, criteria, learning experience, and reflection prompts prepared?
* Do you need to train evaluators?
* Do you have a system for collecting portfolio materials?
* Do you have time to look through portfolios and analyze evidence?
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| **Reaction Assessment:** Very brief assessment of a participant’s experience relative to a specific learning outcome, program outcome, or satisfaction measure |
| **Strengths:*** Provides a convenient means of gaining insight into the student experience
* Quickly identifies areas of weakness and strength for formative assessment
* Can track changes over time (short-term)
* Minimal time commitment for participants
* Provides immediate feedback
 | **Challenges:*** Data can be limited due to brief duration and narrow scope
* Data may be difficult to interpret
* Specific prompts are necessary to acquire meaningful data
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| **Planning questions:*** Do you have a strong prompt?
* Have you reserved time to collect data?
* How will you compile and analyze data in an efficient manner?
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| **Rubric:** A scorecard used to assess needs or outcomes of an individual through self-assessment, observation, or artifacts; including a scale, key dimensions, and descriptions for each dimension |
| **Strengths:*** Clearly states standards and expectations
* Can be used for assessing learning outcomes
* Provides for consistency in rating/grading
* Participant can use rubric to gauge his/her own performance
* Provides both individual and program-level data
* Can provide qualitative and quantitative data
 | **Challenges:*** Developing a rubric can be time consuming
* May require training for users (if self-assessing) or raters
* Limited in use for individual outcomes
* Beware of inter-rater and intra-rater reliability
* Depending on technology resources, combining aggregate data can take time
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| **Planning questions:*** How will you design and test your rubric?
* How will you train your users or raters, if necessary?
* What learning opportunities will be observed, or what artifacts will be collected?
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| **Survey:** A self-report of knowledge, opinions, experiences, actions, and/or observations via a questionnaire including closed-ended and/or open-ended questions |
| **Strengths:*** Can collect feedback from a large sample of individuals
* Relatively fast and easy method for assessing needs, outcomes, and satisfaction
* Many support resources available
* Useful for collecting specific, measurable data
 | **Challenges:*** Survey fatigue and response rates can compromise data validity
* Non-response bias may be present in results
* Limited in type of questions asked
* Lacks depth in data
* Requires thoughtful design
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| **Planning questions:*** What is the best administration method (in-person, via email, etc.)?
* What process will you use to design your instrument and draft your items?
* Do you have a data analysis plan? Do you need to use comparative tools?
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## **Questions about Assessment Methods?**

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