Adapting Evaluation Tools to Meet Your Changing Needs

InterActivity

May 17, 2022

2:00 - 3:15 p.m.

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Honor Children. Champion Play.

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Casandra Firman, M.S., Training & Technical Assistance
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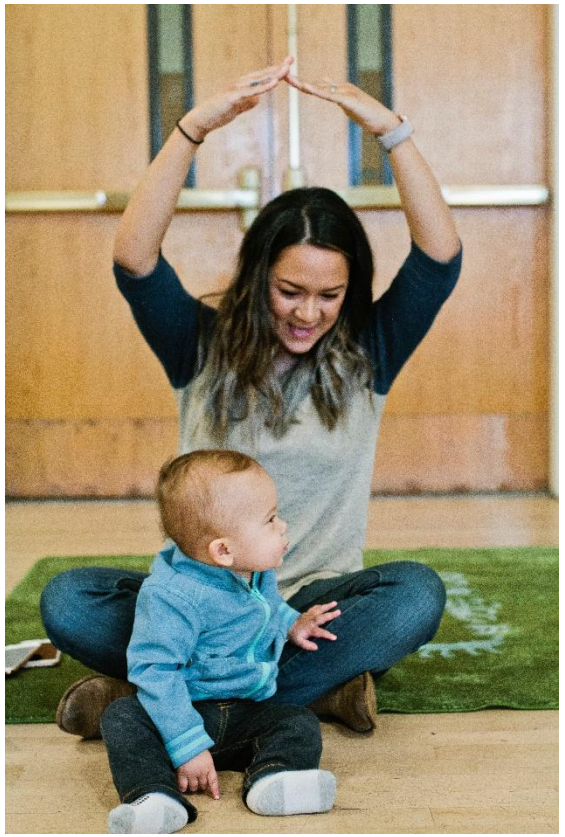
FRIENDS

Yve Susskind, Ph.D., Lead Evaluator, Praxis Associates

PRAXIS
ASSOCIATES LLC

FROM OUTREACH PROGRAM TO FACILITY



Play to Learn at Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) 2009, 2nd location 2013

Special programs for military families

Redevelopment created a town center & new children's museum, April 2021

"This is SUCH a great children's museum. Thank you so much for supporting military children."

"It's very special to have such a great amenity so close to home and it definitely won't go unappreciated."

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Front-end evaluation

JBLM families

22% of children experience special needs

More frequent deployments & trainings

Learned from local & national military partners and existing literature

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SELECTING & ADAPTING A TOOL

Recognized the privilege and duty we had in birthing CM@JBLM

Documenting & evaluating for future replication

Determined a distinct evaluation tool was needed tool to measure participant impact

Strong alignment: PFS & military family readiness

Partnering to create a new tool

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

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KEY QUESTIONS FOR ADAPTING AN EVALUATION TOOL

Casandra Firman, M.S., Training & Technical Assistance Coordinator, FRIENDS Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention

Yve Susskind, Ph.D., Lead Evaluator, Praxis Associates

Our Story

What we wanted to know

QUESTIONS FOR ADAPTING A TOOL

1. **What is the program** I want to learn about?
2. **What do I need to measure?**
3. **What kind of tool** will I need?
4. **Is there an existing tool** that I can use or adapt?
5. **Who would I need to involve**, in what, and for what purposes?

SESSION WORKSHEET ITEMS #1 & #2

On your own for 2 minutes:

What is the program?

Think about your program, project, or activity. What is IT? What is the purpose, goals, location(s)? Who is the audience?

In pairs for about 2 minutes <u>each</u>:

What do you want to measure?

Are you interested in outcomes (change in participant beliefs, behaviors, or status); experience (satisfaction, engagement, cultural responsiveness); reach (attendance, demographics, marketing); or other things?

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SELECTING & ADAPTING YOUR TOOL

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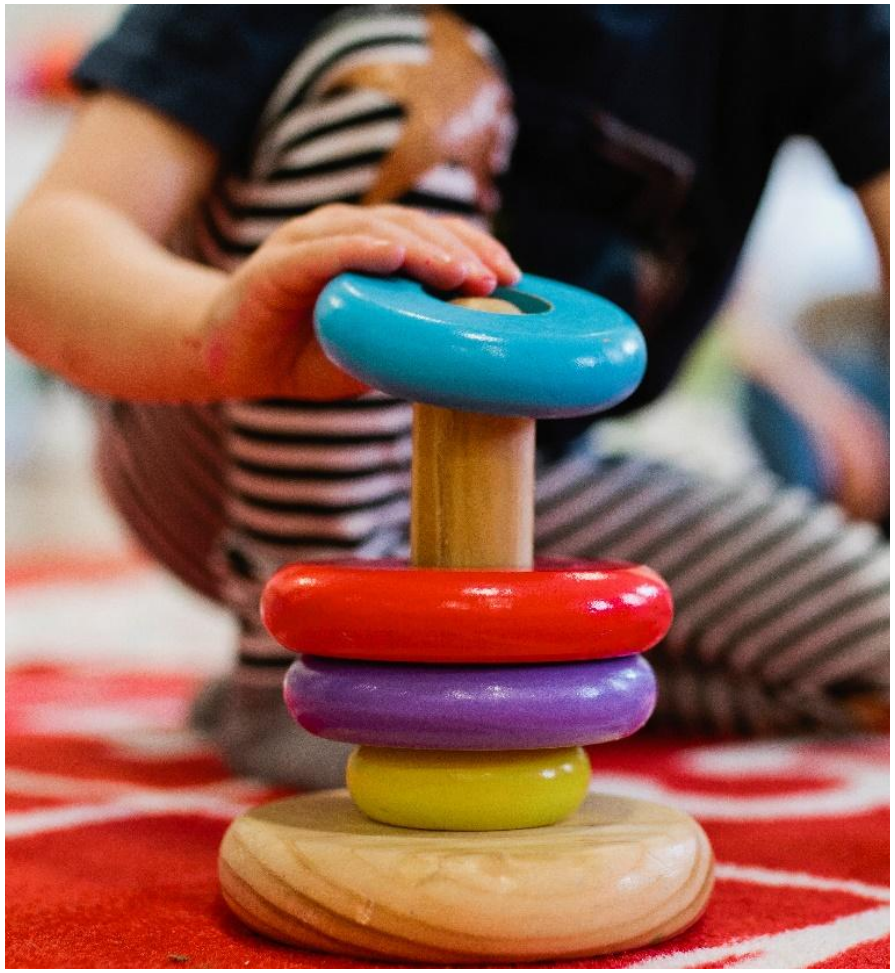
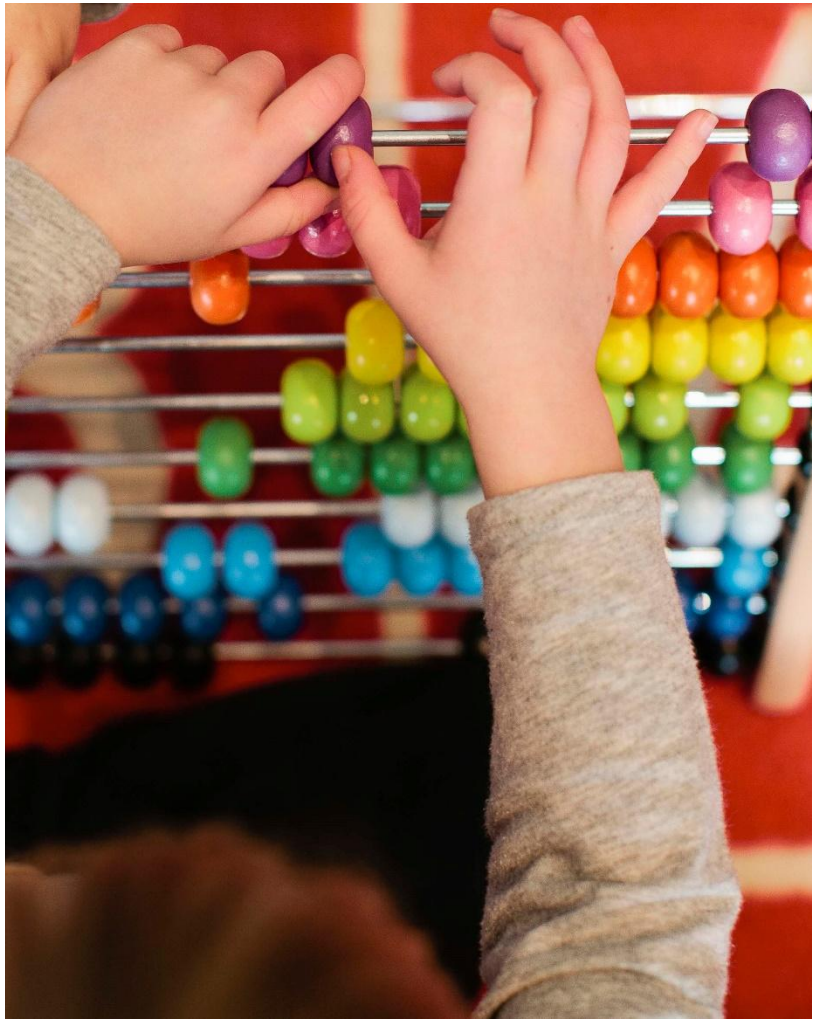
WILL A SURVEY GET YOU WHAT YOU NEED?



GENERALLY SPEAKING, SURVEYS SHOULD BE USED TO COLLECT:

1. Quantitative data
2. About the respondent's experience



QUANTITATIVE DATA

- Answers questions that can be answered with a number
- Variations on:
  - How many?
  - How much?
  - How often?
  - To what extent?
- Requires a refined understanding of what you want to ask and what the answers might be

THE DREADED OPEN TEXT BOX

Surveys are generally not a good method for collecting qualitative data. Open text boxes should be used sparingly, if at all.

- Asks the respondent to make a pronounced cognitive shift
- Questions can be extremely easy to misinterpret and responses can be difficult to analyze
- Takes time to analyze you might not have
- Communicates to your respondent that you don't care about their time

If you feel a pull toward the open text box, ask yourself: "have I clearly identified the information I need?" and "is fielding a survey the way to get it?"

ASKING RESPONDENTS QUESTIONS THEY CAN'T ANSWER

- "Please rate how much you learned"
- "The presenter was knowledgeable about the topic"
- "My colleagues/friends/family would like this"
- "I wouldn't know where to go for help if I had trouble making ends meet"

ASKING RESPONDENTS QUESTIONS THEY CAN ANSWER

Respondents can answer questions about themselves – what they:

- Know
- Feel
- Think
- Have experienced

Many assessments require expertise or knowledge that you cannot assume a respondent has

Hypotheticals are not generally useful

- What we think we would do is not very predictive of what we actually do

OTHER OPTIONS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Quantitative data

- Administrative data
- Secondary data
  - Census
  - American Community Survey

Qualitative data

- Interviews
- Focus groups

SESSION WORKSHEET ITEM #3

Back in your pairs for about 3 minutes <u>each</u>:

What type of tool do you need?

Is what you want to measure quantitative or qualitative? Can you answer your question with closed-ended questions rather than open ended?

Who (or what) will have the answer to the information you need and is a survey the best way to get the information from them?

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FINDING A SURVEY

BUT CAN I JUST WRITE MY OWN?

Good survey design is an underappreciated skill.

Of all the methods of social science data collection, surveys are the least similar to our natural methods of observation and gaining information.

Limited opportunity to:

- clarify what you mean
- ask a follow up question
- understand a respondent's context
- understand how they are interpreting a question

You're also limited in how much time and attention you can demand of the respondent – a hurried, bored, or otherwise unmotivated respondent will not give you good data.

DON’T REINVENT THE WHEEL!

- Even a carefully considered and expertly written item can turn out to be a dud
- Most survey researchers start with questions that have been used before and carefully adapt and add
- And most questions have been asked before!!

WHERE TO LOOK FOR SURVEYS

Evaluations

Peer-reviewed literature

Clearinghouses, guides, professional organizations

EVALUATIONS

Peer organizations with strong evaluations in place are the perfect first stop

- Websites
- Conferences

An organization that is reporting on data similar to what you would like to have is likely to have an underlying report and survey

- And someone is probably willing to share them with you!

PEER REVIEWED LITERATURE

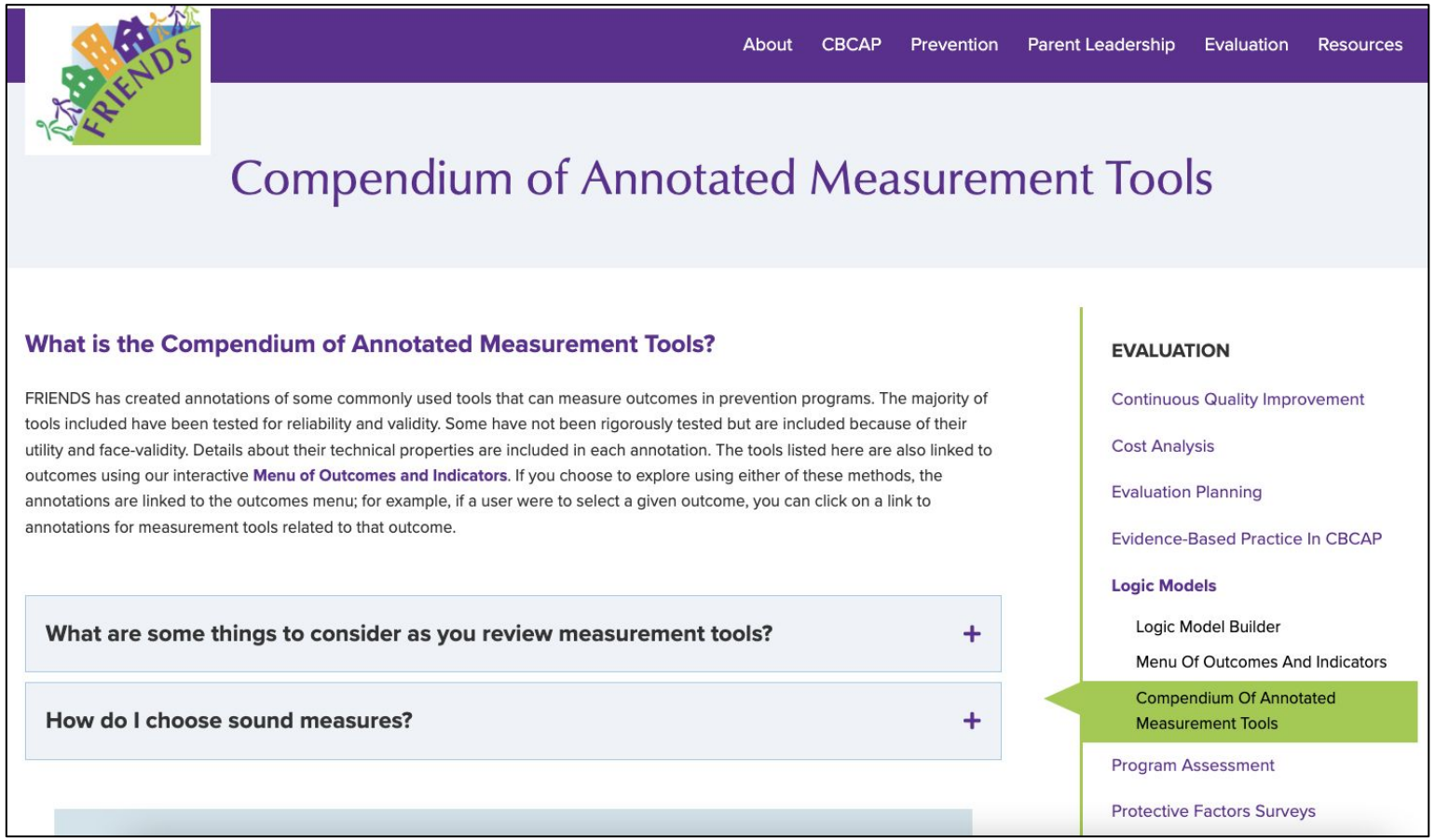
- Google Scholar is as easy to use and as accessible as Google
- Can often find full-text articles without a paywall
- Many articles reporting on the results of a survey will include the survey items themselves
- Authors are also often happy to share articles and surveys
- Don’t sleep on the “Cited by” link

CLEARINGHOUSES, ORGANIZATIONS, & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

It is widely understood that many organizations have a need for evaluation but do not have internal evaluation capacity or the resources to fund an external evaluation

Many organizations are working to fill that gap by bringing good evaluation tools to the field

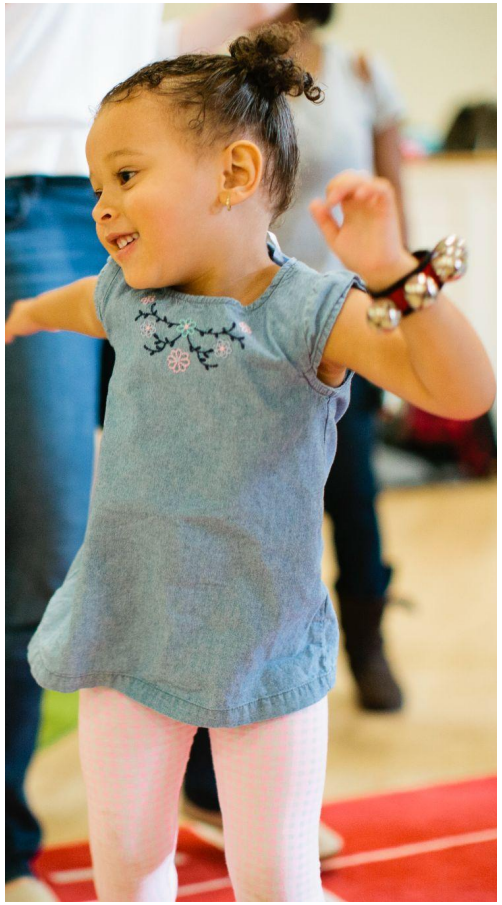
FRIENDS COMPENDIUM OF TOOLS



SESSION WORKSHEET ITEMS #4

On your own or share with a partner, as you prefer, 3 minutes <u>total</u>:

- **Where can you find a tool to adapt?**
- What partner or organization doing similar work can you ask for examples?
- What online resource are you most curious about exploring?



WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SURVEY

Many people underestimate their ability to assess an existing survey for its applicability to their own situation

A good survey is one that:

- Asks for quantitative information
- Asks questions respondents can answer
- Has been validated
- Gets you the information you need

ADAPTING A SURVEY TO MEET YOUR NEEDS

- Cut what you don’t need
- Add carefully
- Test it out before going live

CUT WHAT YOU DON'T NEED

Survey length is critical to data quality

Respondents lose interest fast and are motivated to be done as quickly as possible

- Not completing the survey
- Satisficing – answering questions approximately rather than specifically

Be ruthless about cutting anything you will not use

Any new items should be central to your inquiry

ADD CAREFULLY

It is preferable to use an existing item over writing a new one

Pulling from multiple surveys is a great strategy

Frankenstein

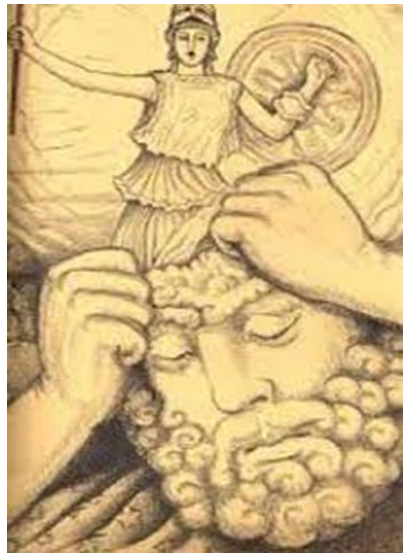
Athena

ADD CAREFULLY

It is preferable to adapt an existing item over writing a new one

Frankenstein

Vampire



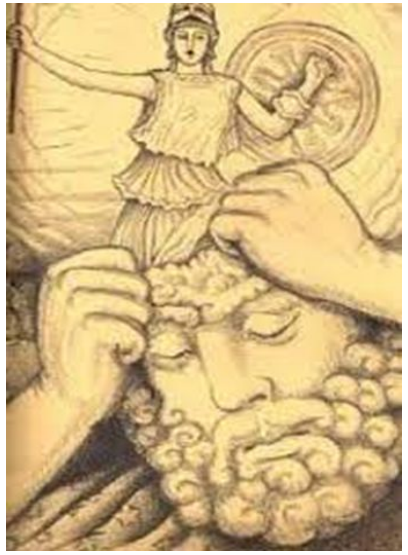
Athena

MINIMALLY ADJUST ITEMS

An existing item can often meet your needs with a slight tweak.

Can you replace a word?

Can you add or replace a response category?



DEVELOPING THE PFS-MF

To adapt the PFS-2 for use with military families, we used a mix of Frankenstein, Vampire, and Athena strategies

PULLING FROM EXISTING SURVEYS

From the PFS-2:

- “The future looks good for our family”

From existing military surveys:

- “My family’s current housing situation fits our needs.”
- Additional demographic items, including military status and pay grade

ADAPTING EXISTING ITEMS

I have people I trust to ask for advice about:

- ▢ Money/Bills/Budgeting
- ▢ Relationships and/or My Love Life
- ▢ Food/Nutrition
- ▢ Stress, Anxiety, and/or Depression
- ▢ Parenting/My Kids
- ▢ Military Life
- ▢ Housing/Moving
- ▢ None of the above

CREATING NEW ITEMS FROM SCRATCH

"The staff understand military life."

"I feel prepared to help my children cope with prolonged separations."

CLASSIC SURVEY TRAPS

Leading questions

- “How much do you love our services?”
- “We hear that families want later hours on weekdays. How late would you like for us to be open?”

Presumptive questions

- “How old were you when you got married?”

Confusing questions

DON’T CONFUSE YOUR RESPONDENT!

Use clear, simple language

- Avoid jargon and $10 words
- Check the reading level

Use direct phrasing and avoid complex structures

Avoid double-barreled questions

- “How satisfied are you with your pay and job conditions?”

Match response categories to questions

- “I worry about family finances” Agree, or how often?

TEST IT OUT

Get initial feedback from a few people before going live with your survey

- Did any questions confuse you?
- Were you ever unsure what you were being asked?
- What questions didn't feel like they applied to you?
- Did any questions seem duplicative?
- Did any questions have response categories that didn't seem to quite fit?

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KEY STAKEHOLDERS IMPROVE YOUR EVALUATION TOOL AND BRING CREDIBILITY.

Especially those who are:

Users - direct participants, program beneficiaries

Doers - people who make it happen (e.g., program staff, operations, budgeters)

Stewards - those with buy-in and commitment to the program (e.g., staff, decision-makers and funders)

And those who will offer:

Validity - whether it's measuring what we think it's measuring

Justice - a right to be there

Utilization - perspective on how the findings of the evaluation will be used

List inspired by Davidson, E. Jane. *Actionable Evaluation Basics: Getting Succinct Answers to the Most Important Questions*. Real Evaluation Ltd., 2013.

WHO & WHY?	*Who we involved & how*	*What we learned*	ARE	OFFER
Program audience (Program participants, respondents) • Experts in their own lives – needs, realities, priorities, culture, language • "Nothing about us without us."	*Focus groups & survey field testing with:* ***Military families at JBLM*** ***FRIENDS Parent Advisors*** ***P2L & CMT families***	• *User experience of the survey & interpretation of survey items* • *Reliability of the tool when tested*	✓ **Users** ❑ Doers ❑ Stewards	✓ **Validity** ✓ **Justice** ❑ Utilization
Providers (People who provide direct service or administer tools) • Whether the tool will yield useful information without unnecessary drains on time & resources	*Interviews & informal conversation with:* ***GT P2L & CM@JBLM staff*** ***JBLM family program staff*** ***Staff of other CMs & CBOs***	• *Information needs & current practices with data collection* • *Issues & lessons learned about collecting data from families on a military installation*	❑ Users ✓ **Doers** ✓ **Stewards**	✓ **Validity** ✓ **Justice** ❑ Utilization
Decision Makers (Administrators, policy makers, funders) • Whether the tool will yield information useful for planning & advocacy • Share guidelines & limitations around data collection • Influence use of tool & data	*On our team:* ***GT program leadership*** *Conversations with:* ***JBLM program administrators***	• *Ensured tool usefulness to GT & other CMs* • *Shared survey culture, opportunities & challenges in the DOD context* • *Offered insight into how DOD programs might use the data*	❑ Users ❑ Doers ✓ **Stewards**	✓ **Validity** ❑ Justice ✓ **Utilization**
Experts (Program content experts, survey design & content experts) • Whether the tool reliably measures what it is intended to measure • Share other relevant research	*On our team:* ***KU & FRIEND*** *Conversations with:* ***DOD military family life researchers***	• *Led development of modified questions & tool design* • *Analyzed & interpreted field testing data* • *Recommended administration, data management & technical support strategies* • *DOD concept of "military family readiness"* • *Related research on challenges for military families* • *Current research & evaluation agendas & tools*	❑ Users ❑ Doers ❑ Stewards	✓ **Validity** ❑ Justice ✓ **Utilization**

JBLM: Joint Base Lewis McChord—**FRIENDS**: FRIENDS National Center for Community Based Child Abuse Prevention—**P2L**: Play to Learn—**CMT**: Children's Museum of Tacoma (downtown)—**GT**: Greentrike—**CM**: children's museum—**CBO**: community based organization—**DOD**: Dept of Defense—**KU**: University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships & Research

SESSION WORKSHEET ITEM #5

Back in your pairs, using the table on the back of your worksheet:

- **Who should you involve?**
- **How?**
- **Why?**

QUESTIONS

&

ANSWERS