



MEASURING YOUR IMPACT DURING COVID-19: SEVEN PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL & HYBRID PROGRAMS

Roxana Salehi, PhD, CE

7 min read

February 2021, © Vitus Research & Evaluation Consulting

Questions? Roxana@vitus.ca

About Vitus

Roxana Salehi, PhD, CE



Thank you for stopping by! My name is Roxana Salehi and I founded Vitus Research & Evaluation Consulting in 2014. Vitus is dedicated to helping organizations around the world design and improve their health and education programs using scientific research and evaluation.

Over the last ten years, I have been the lead consultant for impactful multi-country projects in the health, education, and social services sectors in Canada (my home), Africa, and the Caribbean. You can find some of my publications and sample projects on the website.

I turn data into strategic insights by combining my PhD in Public Health and business and statistics training. I am a Canadian Evaluation Society Credentialed Evaluator (CE).

I currently live in Barcelona and work globally. Before that, I have lived/worked in Tehran, Portland, New York, Ann Arbor, Antigua, Accra, and Toronto. I look forward to meeting you!

Visit: www.vitus.global

Email: roxana@vitus.ca

How to cite this guide: Salehi, R, (2021) Measuring Your Impact During COVID-19: Seven Practical Considerations for Virtual & Hybrid Programs, Vitus Research & Evaluation Consulting, Available at: www.vitus.global/resources

Measuring Your Impact During COVID-19: Seven Practical Considerations for Virtual & Hybrid Programs

The need: Capturing meaningful data and measuring program outcomes are not trivial tasks even at the best of times. During a global pandemic, this work becomes much harder, especially for organizations that have quickly transitioned to virtual or hybrid models of program delivery. **Defining and measuring success associated with virtual or hybrid program delivery was one of the most asked about and challenging topics for the Canadian settlement sector**, according to a national survey conducted with 366 settlement professionals (Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group, 2020). This need must be addressed because meaningful data is even more critical in a time of crisis, providing evidence on how the ongoing pandemic has impacted the most vulnerable populations. Whether for grant proposals, reports, or quality improvement, leaders need to know what is happening in their programs despite, and because of the pandemic.

Purpose and target audience: This guide outlines practical considerations for measuring outcomes associated with virtual or hybrid programs at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides concrete examples, sample questions, and sample tools to help with such tasks. This guide's primary intended audience is the leadership teams within the Canadian settlement sector. However, this guide will outline broad principles applicable to a diverse range of programs, and so other sectors may benefit from it too. Throughout this guide:

- 'The program' refers to any program or service that is fully online or with online and offline blended client support
- The term '**program participants**' is used (other frequently used terms are users, clients, right holders, and priority populations).

The approach:

1. Pause. Review your portfolio & programs. Think about what information you need for reports, grant proposals, & as an organization. Don't skip this step. The time you invest doing this step will save you time and headaches later. If you work with an evaluator, be sure to involve them after you have done some initial thinking yourself.




2. Ask fewer questions about each program but make sure you ask the right questions. Key Evaluation Questions should not be confused with survey or interview questions. These are the 4-5 critical macro-level questions that you should be asking about your programs. Remember that you now have to ask some COVID-19 specific questions. Therefore, focusing on your work and making sure you don't end up with too many questions is critical. Specifics vary, of course, but here are some good ones you could adapt for your own needs:

- a) **How feasible was it to transition to fully/partially virtual program delivery? What factors helped, and what were the challenges?** (Evaluation technical terms: Feasibility, Organizational Readiness)
- b) **Is the program acceptable to the program participants? Is it relevant to their needs?** (Evaluation technical terms: Acceptability, Appropriateness)
- c) **How much modification had to be made to the program because of COVID-19? Were the critical elements kept?** (Evaluation technical terms: Adaptation/Fidelity)
- d) **How much did it/does it cost to effectively deliver this program in its modified form?** (Evaluation technical terms: Efficiency, Cost-Effectiveness)
- e) **Are there aspects of this modified program that should be kept after COVID-19?** (Evaluation technical terms: Sustainability)
- f) **To what extent are this program's desired outcomes achieved under COVID-19 conditions?** (Evaluation technical terms: Intervention Effectiveness).

3. To better understand your programs, look at them from multiple perspectives and at multiple levels. Your funder might only want to know about the impact of programs on program participants but looking at the other levels helps you contextualize your findings. It allows you to articulate your challenges and successes effectively. Figure 1 (next page) demonstrates this point using examples from various projects that Vitus has undertaken during COVID-19.

4. Modify your plans for data collection & use based on what is logistically feasible under COVID-19 conditions but know & document the implications. Table 2 (next page) provides an example of an in-person survey.

Table 1: Some key questions to ask about your virtual/hybrid programs at multiple levels.

| | Level | Ask about or Monitor |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful access to the internet/smartphone |
| | Participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Find out who has the privilege, capacity, and stable internet to use the technology within a household.</i> • Satisfaction with the program • <i>X% of participants said they would recommend the program to their family</i> • Challenges of using the technology • <i>X% of participants said they had challenges with choppy internet or Zoom fatigue</i> • Benefits of using the technology • <i>X% of participants said they feel 'more comfortable' when they attend the workshop virtually rather than in-person</i> |
|  | Service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff's own readiness to offer the virtual/hybrid program |
| | Providers (Staff) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of modifications are staff making to the program? |
|  | Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff-training/support • Organizational readiness for change • The flexibility of the funding model |
| | Sociopolitical environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government COVID-19 regulations • Trends emerging from external research • Privacy laws |

Source: Author adapted from Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child & Youth Mental Health (2020)

Table 2: An example of modifying data collection plans due to COVID-19 Pandemic

| The original plan | Modified scenarios due to COVID-19 | Requirements (not an exhaustive list) | Implications (not an exhaustive list) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In-person qualitative surveys, 15 questions, target of 75 participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys were moved online • 15 questions • 75 participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey software license or familiarity with a free survey platform • The participants are digitally savvy and have access to the internet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only basic features will be available for free. • Excludes participants who are not digitally literate or don't have access to the internet |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced the # questions & used text messaging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants have access to smartphones • Protocol for safe storage of data on a phone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some useful questions had to be eliminated |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced the # of participants from 75 to 40 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and the participants comply with COVID-19 safety requirements • Suitable weather | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety training for staff • Activity may need to be delayed till spring/summer |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved to in-person surveys outdoors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to an accessible, safe outdoor space | |

5. Create simple, clear, & short protocols to support your staff in implementing the revised plans for data collection & use. They make a difference! Below is an example from one of Vitus' projects adapted for COVID-19 times:

Protocol #1: Base line data collection

Applies to: Knowledge test, confidence questionnaire, demographics

Last modified: December 8, 2019

Contact: Research & Evaluation Coordinator at AGENCY NAME

1. One day after students register, the Research & Evaluation Coordinator will email the participants *the knowledge, demographics, & confidence survey* using this link: URL
2. Two days after registration, **staff X** will send a reminder email to students.
3. If more than X% of responses are missing by day 3, **staff X** will phone the participants to problem solve any technical challenges.
4. Six days after registration the survey is closed, and **staff Y** will download the results and saves the file as a password protected file named "*baseline data-date-cohort#*" on this folder: URL

6. When it becomes particularly difficult to reach stakeholders, aim for talking to fewer people but ensure they are the right people. Take advantage of case studies and sampling strategies such as purposeful sampling to achieve this objective. The 'right' people are going to be different depending on your program goals; however, marginalized populations and stakeholders holding crucial insights about your programs should be prioritized. If you work with an evaluator, seek their expertise with sampling strategies and case studies.

7. First, do no harm. Be cognizant of COVID-specific ethical considerations for data collection & use. In addition to the standard ethical considerations such as confidentiality, respect for the respondents' security, dignity, and self-worth, being cognizant of the impact of COVID-19 on your staff, program participants, evaluator, and stakeholders are essential. Avoid unnecessary in-person interactions and keep your questions short and purposeful. Be extra flexible.

References

Clarke SK, Kumar GS, Sutton J, Atem J, Banerji A, Brindamour M, Geltman P, Zaaed N. Potential Impact of COVID-19 on Recently Resettled Refugee Populations in the United States and Canada: Perspectives of Refugee Healthcare Providers. *J Immigr Minor Health*. 2021 Feb;23(1):184-189. doi: 10.1007/s10903-020-01104-4. Epub 2020 Oct 16. PMID: 33067740; PMCID: PMC7566990.

Damschroder LJ, Aron DC, Keith RE, Kirsh SR, Alexander JA, Lowery JC. Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implement Sci*. 2009;4:50.

Dayton, K (2020) Continuing Monitoring and Evaluation Efforts During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Q&A with i-APS. Available at <https://www.agrilinks.org/post/continuing-monitoring-and-evaluation-efforts-during-covid-19-pandemic-qa-i-aps> (last accessed February 8, 2021).

Edmonds J, Flahault A. Refugees in Canada during the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2021; 18(3):947. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030947>

Liu, J., Campana, M. (2020) Settlement Sector and Technology Task Group Preliminary Report (2020) Available at <https://km4s.ca/wp-content/uploads/Settlement-Sector-Technology-Task-Group-Preliminary-Report-December-21-2020.pdf> (last accessed February 8, 2021).

Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child & Youth Mental Health (2020) Evaluating and Improving e-mental health services. A guiding framework for evaluating e-mental health services. Available at https://www.cymh.ca/en/projects/resources/covid-19/covid-19_evaluating_and_improving_e-mental_health_services_wcag.pdf (last accessed February 8, 2021).

Proctor, E., et al., Outcomes for Implementation Research: Conceptual Distinctions, Measurement Challenges, and Research Agenda. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 2011. 38(2): p. 65-76.

Raimondo, E ; Vaessen, J., Branco, M. (2020) Independent Evaluation Group, Adapting evaluation designs in times of COVID-19 (coronavirus): four questions to guide decisions. Available at <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/blog/adapting-evaluation-designs-times-covid-19-coronavirus-four-questions-guide-decisions> (last accessed February 8, 2021).

United Nations Population Fund (2020) Adapting evaluations to the COVID-19 pandemic. Available at https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/FINAL_Covid19_and_Eval.pdf (last accessed February 8, 2021).

Visit: www.vitus.global

Email : roxana@vitus.ca

Book a complimentary 30-minute consultation: <https://calendly.com/vitusconsulting/30min>