

American Evaluation Association Conference 2013

Choosing the Right Database Software

As evaluators, knowing how to choose the best relational database software program can help us make decisions in our own work and support program staff in their decision making.

This worksheet can be used to guide the decision making process. On the first page, document the purpose of the database, the needs of the project. Make multiple copies of the remaining pages and use them to take notes about each option that is under consideration.

What is the purpose of the database?

Who's going to use it? To do what? How will the data be used?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Database Software Worksheet

Option Name: _____

Section 1. The Costs

Costs are linked to the software, developer/vendor and storage location decisions described in the sections that follow. How much is the software? How much will it cost to hire a developer (if needed)? Are there licensing and/or setup fees? What are your costs once the database is up and running? If changes are needed, what are the costs likely to be? What internal costs should be considered (e.g., staff time for data entry and management of database processes)?

Section 2: The Software

- ☐ Software as a Service (SaaS)
- ☐ Pre-Packaged Software (local)
- ☐ Database Builder Software
- ☐ Coding from Scratch

How customizable is it?

Can you choose the information/variables you'll be collecting? If not, does the system have the right information/variables? Can you capture the data you need? If your needs change in the future, to what extent can the database be adjusted?

Database Software Worksheet

How does the software program measure up in terms of your specific needs?

Data Tables

What do the tables look like? How is your data structured? How do you get access to your data?

Data Entry and Data Quality

How easy is it to enter data? How quickly can data be entered? What training will be required for your users? Can you include the data quality and validation checks you need?

Reports

Will the built-in/automated reports meet your internal and external reporting requirements? Is there an option to create custom reports? How user-friendly is this option? How flexible? How much expertise will be required to create and maintain custom reports? What training will be required for your users?

Connecting to Other Systems

Can you import data? Does the data have to be in a specific format in order to be imported? Can you export data? Will it be in the format you need (e.g., for statistical analysis or other reporting software)?

Database Software Worksheet

Section 3: The People (who will build and maintain it)

- ☐ *Software Vendor (SaaS or pre-packaged)*
- ☐ *External Developer (company or individual)*
- ☐ *Internal Developer*

How experienced are they?

Does the person or company have the required technical skills? How well do they understand your needs? Or, do they have a plan for gaining a thorough understanding of your needs?

What will start-up look like?

How long will customization or development take? What training and support will be provided? How will questions be answered and problems resolved? Is the vendor/developer willing to move existing data into the new system (if needed)?

What will ongoing support look like?

How available and responsive will they be? How will questions be answered and problems resolved? How quickly? If changes or upgrades are needed, how will that be handled?

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Section 4: The Location (where the software/data will be stored)

- ☐ *One Personal/Business Computer (not recommended)*
- ☐ *SaaS Vendor's Server (web-based)*
- ☐ *Your Organization's Server*
- ☐ *Web Hosting Company's Server*

How secure will your data be?

Will your data storage be HIPAA and HITECH Act compliant? Will it adhere to any other confidentiality rules that apply?

How reliable is the server?

Does it ever crash? If so, how are backups handled? How often will the server be down for maintenance or other reasons? If you're using a web-based option, how reliable is your internet connection? How fast is your internet connection?
