There are some clear steps to follow when developing your instruments.

First, determine what you want to learn. What questions do you have about your participants, staff or other stakeholders? What questions do you have about how your programs are going? What questions do you have about the impact of your programs?

Second, determine who can give you the answers that you are looking for. Do you have some of the information already? Can staff provide the answers, or should information come directly from participants?

Third, begin outlining your instruments. Create a separate instrument for each type of person—staff, participants, volunteers, or other stakeholders. Each major research question can become a section of your instrument, and you can begin filling in the details with more direct survey, interview, or focus group questions. Keep in mind that the instrument will also need to be analyzed. Think about how you can make the instrument as simple as possible. Remember two key phrases from social science: GIGO (garbage in, garbage out) and Nice to know has got to go. Stick to the essentials only.

Fourth, format your instrument. Make sure your instrument looks nice, encourages the person completing it to fill answer every question and includes all necessary instructions.

Fifth, test your instrument with a small group of people. Under ideal circumstances, you can test it with the same type of person who will be completing the instrument in final form. If this isn't possible, have people role-play as if they were a staff member, participant, or other stakeholder.

Once you have made any revisions identified during your testing, you are ready to begin administering your instrument and using the data you collect!