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Selecting a Database

Questions to Consider	Database #1	Database #2	Database #3
	1. GENERAL TECHNICAL INFORMATION		
Computers & Operating System versions: ▪ What types of computers and operating systems (OS) does your agency use? What OS versions? For example, Windows XP or Mac OS X? ▪ Which are supported by the database?			
Internet access: ▪ Is internet access required to use the database? ▪ Is it an optional way to access the database?			
Records: ▪ How many records can the database can hold? ▪ Is there a cap or maximum number?			
Is the data import user-friendly? ▪ What format are your records currently in? How will you move records from your current system into this new system? ▪ Does the database have an import function? What file formats will it import (excel, etc.) Describe options.			
Technical Support: ▪ Does the database company offer ongoing technical support? What does it include and what is the cost?			

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Selecting a Database

Questions to Consider	Database #1	Database #2	Database #3
	2. DATA ENTRY		
How many concurrent users can be in the database at the same time? Does each user need a license?			
How complex is the system? Is it user-friendly or will there be a steep learning curve for your staff? Does the vendor provide free training and written instructions?			
Do you have off-site staff that will need to enter data? How will that work?			
Can the data fields be set up to provide the option to skip or enter "unknown"?			
	3. MODIFYING FIELDS AND SCREENS		
Does the default database meet your needs? ▪ Can it be initially modified to meet your needs? ▪ What steps are involved? What costs?			
Further database modification over time: ▪ Later, if you need to modify databases fields or functions at any point, what changes can your agency staff simply make in house? ▪ When must the developer make the changes? Are there separate fees when the developer must modify things?			

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How flexible is the database? For example: Can your agency easily hide fields? Can you change a field from a text box to a drop-down or checkbox menu? For fields like dropdowns or checkboxes, is it easy to add or remove answer options as needed?			
	4. PERMISSIONS & ACCESS		
Can each database user be assigned a unique user identifier and password?			
Are there a maximum number of unique users that can be registered in the system? Are their increased costs associated with having more registered users?			
Does the database have predetermined permission access levels? Do those default access levels meet your needs?			
Can you create additional customized access levels? Does the database allow you to control what fields will be seen by whom? (e.g. volunteers, counselors/advocates, financial/administrative, etc.)			
Does the database give your agency the option to manage individual and group user permissions for each access level? Is it easy for your staff to manage adding, deleting, and inactivating unique users?			
	5. REPORTS		
Are there template reports? Do these meet your needs?			

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Can you create customized reports? Will the customization options meet your agency needs?			
Does this database allow you to collect and report on the factors you need to for your current funders? Do you think it is flexible enough to meet your needs if your funders change?			
	6. DATA STORAGE		
Can the data be stored onsite at your agency? Or must it be stored offsite?			
Can your agency easily do your own local backup of your data?			
Offsite options: For offsite options including data records backup, what measures are guaranteed by the vendor? ▪ Security ▪ Confidentiality ▪ Record ownership ▪ Reliable access (internet outages, vendor changes ownership, etc.) ▪ Costs			
On a separate paper, detail the benefits and risks to your agency of onsite versus offsite storage. Include analysis of legal ramifications to victim confidentiality and ownership of data. (see below).			

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	7. CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA OWNERSHIP		
Can the database be configured and the data stored in way that meet all of your agency's legal confidentiality obligations? This includes: ▪ U.S. federal laws (e.g. VAWA grantee confidentiality) ▪ U.S. state and territorial confidentiality laws ▪ Individual staff's professional confidentiality obligations (e.g. lawyers with privilege, etc.)			
If you enter into a contract with this company/vendor, will your agency retain full ownership and complete control over who can access the data? ▪ In your analysis, be sure to address scenarios where a subpoena or court order is issued directly to the company. What notification process will the vendor agree to? Will this vendor process enable you to legally clarify the scope of a subpoena or court order before the information is released? ▪ Can you set it up your system that no Personally Identifying Information will be offsite? How could this benefit your agency's confidentiality obligations?			
Can the system be secured so that 3rd parties (people who are not employed by your agency) will never have access to your database records? ▪ If 3rd parties have access, would they ever be able to see Personally Identifying Information? Would this violate any legal confidentiality obligations you have?			

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	8. BREECHES, LIABILITY & NOTICE		
In situations of unauthorized access (whether by registered users or outsiders), will the system have some record of it? Is there an audit trail that can be reviewed?			
Will the database company provide immediate notification of any known or potential database breeches?			
Will the company/vendor provide immediate notification when they learn about potential security holes or flaws that need patches or updates? Will they provide identified security fixes when the database needs these upgrades? Will there be a cost?			
How does the company handle requests from law enforcement, subpoenas, search warrants or other court orders? Will the company immediately notify your agency upon receipt of such legal requests? When will they act unilaterally? When will they agree to let your agency determine course of action?			
If the database company changes ownership or goes bankrupt, what guarantees do they provide to existing clients?			

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