Best practices for setting up a Database for Humanitarian Response in ActivityInfo
Insights from UNHCR, OCHA and IOM

Starting out	- If available and possible share the costs with the regional office or look for an existing ActivityInfo subscription in the organization. - Increase leverage for using ActivityInfo as a reporting platform by adding a reference to it into partner PPAs and the RRP document itself. - Avoid parallel reporting processes or platforms by involving government counterparts and ensuring that the RRP and the organization's indicators are linked and aligned. - Gain the support of senior management for the implementation of the system, make sure sector leads drive the process. - Implement in phases (monitoring, funding, planning etc.) - Ensure all platforms have a data quality process with similar criteria.
Thinking about database structure	- When you work in very large programmes with multiple field offices involved, consider setting up a structure that follows the information flow from field office to partner organization and vice versa. - Use one database for all sectors reporting instead of multiple separate databases. Use folders to separate the sectors from each other. This makes data consolidation, data extraction and user management quicker and easier as you don't need to maintain, bring together and invite people to multiple separate databases. If there are additional reporting requirements for the partner organizations, (for example from another donor or regional office) include them in the sector folder. - When there are many common indicators across multiple sectors but you also need to collect additional indicators that are specific to each sector create separate but similar forms. - If you need to consolidate data from previous years, keep all data and forms under the same database and try to maintain a similar reporting format. This makes multi-year data consolidation much easier and facilitates data extraction. - Adapt the structure of the databases and forms to partner's capacity and the level of indicator complexity or variety; for a small number of similar indicators consider using one form.
Leveraging reference forms	- Use reference forms for lists of common data that will need to be reused multiple times; this makes form updates easier as there is only one place where an update would need to be applied. - If you work with projects which are connected to the sectors' activities, link all sectors forms and activities to a main projects form. - Use reference fields to bring in key information from a common reference form. Combine them with new fields and validation rules to control data collection further. - Use the platform as a repository for common data and reference for categorical values
Managing partners	- Provide quarterly training sessions for both colleagues and partners on ActivityInfo and scripting as well as documentation of logframes, SOPs and step-by-step guides for easy reference. - Promote the use of script approach to ensure reproducibility and control of the information flow regardless of the language or technology used. - Allow partners to have more than one reporting focal point if needed. - Give partners access to view all records so as to have a good overview of all activities and present results during interagency meetings to remind them of responsibilities. - Create 'view only' roles for donors, sector leads and other stakeholders who only need to view data. - Clean up user lists quarterly to keep user management on track. - Use relevance rules to show only what is relevant to the reporting partner and decrease the time they spend looking for what to report to. - Use date fields and locks to lock reporting and prevent partner organizations alter or delete data about a project or an activity, if the project has expired.
Producing information products	- Leverage the fact that data is harmonized and centralized in a common database and the flexibility of the ActivityInfo API to create dynamic dashboards and other visualizations to share the work of partner organizations and your organization's impact with the world. - Use the ActivityInfo API and external software to combine data in ActivityInfo with data found in other sources or to create additional tools to facilitate the work of your colleagues and partner organizations. - Start with national level sector products and gradually increase granularity by adding settlement/camp level products.