

Guidelines for Selecting an Electronic Device for OMS

Question: Why should my center use an electronic device to collect surveys? We've been using paper surveys and that seems to work fine for us.

Answer: Paper surveys are still an option for collecting surveys, along with many other methods, but we strongly encourage you to consider the pros and cons of all your options. In fact, we often suggest using multiple methods, since caregivers and MDT members may prefer to use different options to share their feedback.

One of the major drawbacks of paper surveys is the amount of time they take, both for caregivers and for center staff. The surveys are designed so that certain items are only appropriate if a previous response is selected (for example, "If yes, then..." types of items asking for more information about a topic). In the online version of the surveys, these items are automatically skipped if they are not relevant based on a previous response. On a paper survey, all possible options must be available and the caregiver must read instructions to know which items to skip. The surveys thus appear longer on paper due to these items and instructions. In addition, the online version of the surveys is divided so that usually only 4 or fewer items display on each page, ensuring that response options are always visible and making each page less overwhelming compared to seeing all the items printed out in a paper survey. All of these factors contribute to making electronic surveys faster and easier for caregivers. In fact, when we analyzed results from the Initial Visit Caregiver Surveys, we found that 70% of participants completed the survey in less than 5 minutes when using electronic methods and 90% completed it in less than 10 minutes. CACs using paper surveys have historically reported that surveys can take longer than this (up to 15 or 20 minutes for some caregivers), perhaps due to the factors mentioned above, so switching to electronic options could significantly reduce the time burden on participants.

Paper surveys must also be entered into the online system on a regular basis, presenting a potential time burden for staff members. This essentially doubles the amount of combined effort per survey – the caregiver completes it on paper and then a staff member must enter the responses into the online system. Even though entering a paper survey only takes about 3 to 5 minutes to enter on average, this can certainly add up over time. Imagine that your center

collected 100 Initial Visit Caregiver Surveys. This would take about 300 to 500 minutes, or 5 to 8 hours (essentially an entire workday), to enter all those surveys. The surveys also need to be entered on a regular basis, about once or twice a month, so the assigned staff member would need to frequently fit this into their schedule. On the other hand, setting up a computer/tablet only takes a few minutes at the beginning and then requires no maintenance from that point forward – results are automatically sent to your center’s account as soon as each caregiver presses “Submit” at the end of the survey. In addition, entering paper surveys increases the potential for data entry errors. For example, a staff member may mistakenly check off the wrong box or have trouble reading a caregiver’s handwriting in an open-ended comment.

Question: We aren’t very “tech savvy” at our center. Our staff members aren’t very good with computers and/or we think caregivers won’t be comfortable using technology like this.

Answer: It is certainly true that not everyone finds computers easy to use. However, NCA specifically chose a survey system that is simple and intuitive. We also offer a variety of training materials, in different formats depending on how you learn best (written materials AND video demonstrations/webinars) and you are always welcome to call or email us if you would like us to talk you through something, no matter how small. We are also do most customizations for you, such as adding your center’s logo, name, contact information, and extra items by request. That means all you’ll need to do is type in that link on your computer/tablet (better yet, save it as a bookmark/favorite so it’s easy to find and you won’t have to type it in each time) and then hand the computer/tablet to the caregiver. There’s no need to download special software – it is just through the web browser like any other website on the Internet. We are confident that even the least tech savvy CAC staff member can learn to use OMS and we will help you any way we can!

We know how important it is to not jump to conclusions about the caregivers we serve, right? Well this includes assuming that someone does not know how to use various types of technology. Computers and cell phones are a huge part of our society today and many people use them on a daily basis. Basing your OMS process on a potentially false perception like this does a disservice to the caregivers, as well as the center staff. Paper surveys have many drawbacks (see above), making a computer/tablet a better option for most centers. In addition, a computer/tablet can often be obtained for little to not cost to your center (see FAQs below),

making it a worthwhile, low-risk option. You can certainly still have paper copies on hand for some caregivers (for example, caregivers unwilling to use technology due to religious, cultural, or other personal beliefs), but at least give caregivers the option to choose. Even if only a fraction of caregivers choose to use the computer/tablet, at least that sub-section of surveys will not need to be entered by staff members, potentially saving many hours of staff time over the course of your center's participation in the program. We specifically switched to an online program to make the process easier for our members, so please take advantage of it!

Question: Do I get a tablet from NCA? How else can we pay for OMS-related equipment?

Answer: To keep OMS a free membership benefit, NCA is unfortunately not able to purchase tablets for our hundreds of members across the country. Although NCA does cover the cost of the online system itself through your member dues and other funds, we rely on CACs to find local resources for any technology/devices you may wish to purchase for the program. Many CACs, State Chapters, and Regional CACs are able to use a variety of funds to pay for tablets. Private foundations and public funding such as VOCA may also cover such expenses, as they are used directly with your clients. For resources in your specific area, we recommend speaking with your CAC's Director or grant administrator (if you are a staff person) or CAC Directors can speak with State Chapters or Regional CACs to find out about resources to cover OMS technology costs in your area. Some CACs have even had equipment donated to their center by businesses or individuals in the local community. Remember, you do not need a high-end device to use OMS – most anything with an Internet connection will do (see next question).

Question: What features or technical specifications should we look for when purchasing a tablet or other computer equipment for OMS?

Answer: Virtually any device capable of connecting to the Internet can be used to collect surveys, so most of the features you will look for will be based on the needs of your individual center. **One very important thing to consider is whether or not you will have access to WiFi Internet in your center.** Virtually all tablets require WiFi to connect to the Internet, so if you are in a location without stable WiFi access, you may wish to consider using a laptop or desktop computer, since these regular computers will support wired connections (i.e. Ethernet cable, DSL). Overall, keep in mind that more expensive device options are not usually necessary

(something in the \$50 - \$100 range should be more than sufficient). The most popular device choices so far across CACs have been the Kindle Fire, the Google Nexus, and other tablets based on the Android operating system. A small number of centers have chosen the iPad or iPad Mini, but these devices tend to be more expensive. If you plan on using the device for other purposes, it may be worth spending more on a higher end device, but in general we recommend that the device you purchase for OMS only be used for collecting surveys, since you will be handing this devices to potential hundreds of caregivers over time.

In general, the more important factor will be what web browser you are using on your device. Surveys will be supported by virtually any web browser, but in our experience Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox work the best. The Silk web browser on the Kindle Fire and the Safari web browser on Apple devices also tend to work well. Chances are that you will not experience any problems with your chosen web browser. However, keep in mind that some organizations (especially hospital-based or government-based centers) may need to get approval or assistance from your IT department to download a new web browser. For example, most PCs come with Internet Explorer by default, which tends to have more glitches across a variety of websites (not just the OMS online system).

You can also use older donated devices, such as an older laptop or desktop computer. However, you may need to update the Internet option on this computer to a modern browser such as Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, or a newer version of Internet Explorer (9 or higher). In general, whenever you receive a donated device, you should ask your IT department to ensure that it is wiped clean and the newest version of your chosen web browser has been installed.

What size device should I choose?

Some centers may wish to have something small and portable that can be used in multiple locations. For this, you will likely want to use a small to mid-size tablet. In general 6" to 10" screen sizes are ideal, because they are large enough (without being too bulky) that the items on the screen are easy to read and the touch keyboard will have large enough buttons to make typing convenient.

However, some centers may be concerned that small tablets like this could be easily stolen. To reduce this risk, there are two main options (beyond just keeping close watch on the tablet and using common sense about the location you are having caregivers take the survey). First, you could choose to buy a larger tablet or a light-weight laptop, which would be harder to slip into a purse and walk out of the building with, for example. Second, you could purchase a specially designed case/stand or locking cable that attaches to the tablet to prevent theft. A quick search on Amazon for “tablet security” lock, cable, stand, case, etc. will bring up many relatively low-cost options (generally between \$20 and \$40). However, so far CACs have not experienced problems with theft by caregivers, as they administer the surveys in a secure location and they make sure that the caregivers return the tablet to them before leaving the center.

One thing that you should also consider is how to secure the tablet when it is not in use. We recommend keeping it in a locked filing cabinet or other area, especially if you are in a shared space where many different people might have access. Some devices also have security options that can help locate the device if it is stolen. Consider all your options, use your best judgment, and feel free to ask your Chapter or NCA’s OMS Coordinator if you have any questions!