

Building a Database

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Deciding to build a database should be based on a group of factors. Among them:

- Certainty that the information does not already exist in some kind of electronic form.
- A minimum purpose or a minimum story for which the database can be used, whether it is to keep track of complex information over time or to provide the context for at least one important story.
- Whether the database will be a useful archive and reference for reporters and whether reporters can add to it to for future stories.
- How many categories (columns or fields of information) will be required and how many records will have to be entered.
- A realistic estimate regarding the personnel and time needed to create the database.

After deciding to build a database, you need to decide on the software. A spreadsheet or a database manager is usually the choice. A database manager is preferred because you can establish rules for the data entry to keep entry errors to a minimum. You can create a look-up table in either software and that will reduce the amount of information you need to type.

If you are going to use codes, you need to establish a code sheet at the beginning that will be followed rigorously. Also, establish a “key field” that could be used to link to other datasets.

Also, be accurate with address information so you can easily create map with data.