

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, surveys, checklists	When need to quickly or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can complete anonymously • Administer to many people • Can get lots of data • Can generalize to larger population • Sample questionnaires exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might not get careful feedback • Wording can bias participant's responses • Impersonal • May need sampling expert • Doesn't get full story
Interviews – structured and unstructured	When want to fully understand someone's feelings, impressions or experiences, or learn more about answers from questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops relationship with participant • Can be flexible with participant • Get full range and depth of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be costly • Can take much time • Can be hard to analyze and compare • Can be generalized to broad population
Documentation Review	When want impressions of how program operates, uses applications, finances, memos, minutes, reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get comprehensive and historical information • Doesn't interrupt activities • Information already exists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Info can be incomplete • Need to be clear about what is being looked for • Not a flexible means of data collection, restricted to what exists
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View operations of a program as they are actually occurring • Can adapt to events as they occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to interpret • Can be complex to categorize observations • Can influence behavior of participants • Takes time
Focus Groups	Explore a topic in depth with a small group, through discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly get common impressions • Can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time • Can convey key information about programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be expensive • Can be hard to analyze responses • Need good facilitator • Difficult to schedule • Cannot be generalized to broader population
Community meetings	Explore a topic with a large group to get a general sense of an issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of a large number of people • Opportunity to hear from individuals who may not have been involved otherwise • Can alert non-participants to what the project is doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively superficial level of information • Can be dominated by one person • Participants may not be comfortable speaking in a group