

Examples of Data Collection Methods

Method	Purpose	Advantages	Challenges	Resources/ Capacity Required
Questionnaires, surveys, checklists	When need to quickly and/or easily get a lot of information from people in a non-threatening way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can complete anonymously • Inexpensive to administer • Easy to compare and to analyze • Can administer to many people • Can get lots of data • Can be adapted into many forms (online, paper, verbal) • Many sample questionnaires already exist (but you may still need to adapt them) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might not get careful feedback • Question wording can bias respondent's answers • Impersonal • Doesn't always get the full story • Adapting existing surveys takes time 	Low
Interviews	When you want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a full range and depth of information • Develop relationships with stakeholders • Can be flexible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can take a lot of time • Can be hard to analyze or compare • Can be costly • Interviewer can bias responses 	Moderate-High
Document review	When you want an impression of how strategy operates without interrupting strategy; from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get comprehensive and historical information • Doesn't interrupt strategy or stakeholder's routine in strategy • Information already exists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often takes a lot of time • Information can be incomplete • Need to be clear about what you are looking for • Not flexible means to get data; data is restricted to what already exists 	Moderate
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a strategy actually operates, particularly about processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View operations of a strategy or a PSC (Prevention Systems Capacity) as they are actually occurring • Can adapt to events as they occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors • Can be complex to categorize observations • Can influence behaviors of strategy participants • Can be expensive 	High
Focus Groups	Explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g. about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly and reliably get common impressions • Can be efficient way to get much range and great depth of information in a short time • Can convey key information about strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be hard to analyze responses • Need a good facilitator for safety and closure • Difficult to schedule 6-8 people together 	Moderate-High
Case studies	To fully understand or depict stakeholder's experiences in strategy, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases (if cases are comparable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully depicts stakeholder's experience in strategy input, process and results • Powerful means to portray strategy to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe • Represents depth of information, rather than breadth. 	High

Pros and Cons of Quantitative Data

Pros	Cons
You can collect a wide variety of information quickly	You may miss out on a more in-depth understanding of what you are studying
Provides a quick “snapshot” of results for busy decision makers	Does not enhance the information shared with decision-makers
You can do statistical analysis that predict changes	Statistics are not always feasible or appropriate for program evaluation
Statistics are seen as credible data to decision makers	Does not allow for community knowledge to be shared
Tools may already exist that have been tested and ‘validated’ for use in research studies	Data collection tools (sometimes) are not easy to develop or adapt and may not be culturally appropriate

Pros and Cons of Qualitative Data

Pros	Cons
You gain a more in-depth understanding of what you are evaluating	Can be resource-intensive and time-consuming
Enhance the information shared with decision makers	Data collection requires more staff training
Data collection tools are (usually) easier to develop	Data analysis may require more staff training
Allows more community knowledge to be shared	Subject to misinterpretation (Quantitative methods are not immune to this, however)
Can be more culturally appropriate	May be so specific that it is hard to draw broad conclusions across populations or contexts.