

Sampling of Common Evaluation Data Collection Tools

Method	Purpose	Advantages	Disadvantages
Surveys/ Questionnaires	Instrument composed of a series of queries or statements that are used to gather information from a few or many respondents in a user-friendly and convenient form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive to administer • Data is easily analyzed • Can deploy to a few or many people • Can gather a lot of data • Respondents can be anonymous • Can administer online, if sample allows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impersonal • Might not receive precise feedback • Sample bias • Doesn't get full story • Wording of questions can influence responses
Secondary Data/ Document Review	Collect data from reviewing program records (financial, organizational, etc.) Often used to understand how a program runs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interruption of program or participants • Information is usually readily available • Information should be unbiased • Provides access to current and past program information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can require quite a bit of time • Data is restricted to what has already been collected • Information/data may not be complete
Focus groups	A structured in-depth discussion group guided by a facilitator Questions/topics are framed prior to meeting, though the discussion moves freely within the topic areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quickly gather data in a reliable method • Efficient way to gather in-depth information • Can collect a range of data quickly • Participants are usually chosen because they have insight, ideas, input related to a particular topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be difficult to analyze responses (bias, sample) • Need a skilled facilitator • Can be difficult to schedule • Need a convenient location and setting that won't influence the group members
Interviews	One on one discussion using a series of questions or topics to gather information about attitudes, interests, knowledge, opinions, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to get a broader range of information – also more in-depth • Develops relationships • Can be very structured to unstructured (questions specified in advance for a structured interview to unstructured – based on a list of topics) • Conducted in person or by telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Difficult to analyze and compare • Could be expensive • Responses can be biased by the interviewer • Need a convenient location and setting that won't influence the interviewee
Observation	Observer uses a specified form to gather information (evidence) that can be seen and documented by another person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • View individuals or program operations as they are actually occurring • Can be prearranged • Provides a description of something that can be observed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to interpret seen behaviors • May influence behaviors of program participants • Costly • Requires a trained observer and protocol with observation form

Adapted from materials from the Free Management Library at: <http://www.managementhelp.org/> and the Western Michigan University Glossary of Evaluation Terms at: <http://ec.wmich.edu/glossary/glossarySearch.htm>