

Making Data Collection Decisions

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Decisions
<p>SURVEYS</p> <p>(Several commercially available, or unique instruments can be developed)</p>	<p>Easy to quantify and summarize results; quickest and cheapest way to gather new data rigorously, useful for large samples, repeated measures, comparisons between units and to norms/targets; Good for studying attitudes and perceptions – can also collect some behavioral reports.</p>	<p>Hard to obtain data on behavior, context shaping behavior (attribution). Not suited for subtle, sensitive issues. Surveys are impersonal and difficult to construct. Must address language and administration challenges; must avoid non-response, biased or invalid answers, over-interpretation with small samples.</p>	<p>Who gets surveyed (sampling)?</p> <p>How will confidentiality be maintained?</p> <p>Validity of self-assessment?</p> <p>What are standards of desirability?</p> <p>Need for repeated measures - what intervals?</p>
<p>INTERVIEWS</p> <p>(Structured, semi-structured, intercept)</p>	<p>Readily cover many topics and features; can be modified before or during interview; can convey empathy, build trust; rich data; provide understanding of respondents' viewpoints and interpretations. Good for studying attitudes and perceptions – can also collect some behavioral reports.</p>	<p>Expensive, sampling problems in large programs; respondent and interviewer bias; non-comparable responses; time consuming to analyze and interpret responses to open-ended questions. Training and protocols required to conduct.</p>	<p>Who gets interviewed (sampling)?</p> <p>How will confidentiality be maintained?</p> <p>Validity of self-assessment?</p> <p>What are standards of desirability?</p> <p>Need for repeated measures - what intervals?</p>
<p>OBSERVATIONS</p> <p>(Participants during program sessions, participants in other settings)</p>	<p>Rich data on hard-to-measure topics (e.g., actual practices, behaviors). Behavioral data independent of self-descriptions, feelings, opinions; data on situational, contextual effects. Good for studying program implementation and some behavioral changes.</p>	<p>Constraints on access (timing, distance, objections to intrusion, confidentiality, safety); costly, time-consuming; observer bias, low inter-observer reliability; may affect behavior of people observed; hard to analyze, interpret, report data; may seem unscientific. Training and protocols required to conduct.</p>	<p>What subjects will be observed</p> <p>How many at which levels?</p> <p>Need for repeated measures - what intervals?</p>
<p>RECORD REVIEW</p> <p>(E.g., program records, school records, case management records)</p>	<p>Nonreactive; often quantifiable; repeated measures show change; credibility of familiar or standardized measures (e.g., birthweight, arrest incidents, drug test results, staff or parent assessment results); often cheaper and faster than gathering new data; can include data from other independent sources. Good for determining (behavioral) status.</p>	<p>Access, retrieval, analysis problems can raise costs and time requirements; validity, credibility of sources and measures can be low. Definitions must be determined prior to use, are often externally determined, can not be customized; need to analyze data in context; limited data on many topics.</p>	<p>Which documents?</p> <p>How can access be obtained?</p> <p>Need for repeated measures - what intervals?</p>

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Method	Validity	Reliability	Available Resources	Cultural Appropriateness
SURVEYS	LOW No opportunity for clarification Participants often choose responses other than those provided. Participants may not want to report private behavior. Participants may not be aware of their own actions, behaviors or attitudes.	HIGH Administration is consistent from one individual to next. Standard response choices provide consistent range of responses. Little opportunity for data collector to influence results.	ECONOMICAL Mass distributed. Costs based on number of mailings, use of phone or mail, incentives.	VARIED Best for literate, middle class American-born populations. Particularly bad for immigrants and refugees.
INTERVIEWS	HIGH Can clarify questions and probe for more in-depth responses, Personal interaction can establish rapport for open discussion. Focus groups can foster discussion and sharing. Focus groups can clarify individual viewpoints through dialog with others.	LOW Interviews are unique based on comments of respondents; different questions and probes likely to be used.	MODERATE Individual interviews: moderate expense. Focus group: low to moderate expense.	STRONG Individualized interviews work well when paper formats are threatening or invasive and when behavior or attitudes pose a problem. Focus groups work well when the group opinion is the cultural norm.
OBSERVATIONS	HIGH Observers can directly observe behavior which may not be accurately reported otherwise. Observers can directly observe behaviors which have standards developed by professionals or institutions.	MODERATE Observers need structured protocols for coding their observations. Less structured observer formats reduce reliability because different observers may reach different conclusions.	MODERATE - EXPENSIVE Time is required in order to observe behaviors. This can be mitigated by using "natural observers."	MODERATE Cultural differences in behavior may be misinterpreted.
RECORD REVIEW	LOW to MODERATE Not really designed to measure, rather to document/record	LOW to HIGH Depends on whether there are standards for record keeping.	ECONOMICAL Data are part of the service delivery process and usually already exist. (Use of case records for evaluation requires up front planning). Some issues of access, confidentiality.	VARIED Depends on service delivery, appropriateness of program. May over or under-represent certain groups due to bias.