### Information Collection Tools – Advantages and Disadvantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Collection Tools</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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</table>
| **Observation**              | - Collect data where and when an event or activity is occurring  
                              - Does not rely on people’s willingness to provide information  
                              - Directly see what people do rather than relying on what they say they do | - Susceptible to observer bias  
                              - Hawthorne effect – people usually perform better when they know they are being observed  
                              - Does not increase understanding of why people behave the way they do |
| **Document Review**          | - Relatively inexpensive  
                              - Good source of background information  
                              - Unobtrusive  
                              - Provides a “behind the scenes” look at a program that may not be directly observable  
                              - May bring up issues not noted by other means | - Information may be inapplicable, disorganized, unavailable or out of date  
                              - Could be biased because of selective survival of information  
                              - Information may be incomplete or inaccurate  
                              - Can be time consuming to collect, review, and analyze many documents |
| **Interviews**               | - Useful for gaining insight and context into a topic  
                              - Allows respondents to describe what is important to them  
                              - Useful for gathering quotes and stories | - Susceptible to interview bias  
                              - Time consuming and expensive compared to other data collection methods  
                              - May seem intrusive to the respondent |
| **Focus Groups**             | - Quick and relatively easy to set up  
                              - Group dynamics can provide useful information that individual data collection does not provide  
                              - Is useful in gaining insight into a topic that may be more difficult to gather information through other data collection methods | - Susceptible to facilitator bias  
                              - Discussion can be dominated or sidetracked by a few individuals  
                              - Data analysis is time consuming and needs to be well planned in advance  
                              - Does not provide valid information at the individual level  
                              - The information is not representative of other groups |
| Surveys and Questionnaires | ▪ Administration is comparatively inexpensive and easy even when gathering data from large numbers of people spread over wide geographic area  
▪ Reduces chance of evaluator bias because the same questions are asked of all respondents  
▪ Many people are familiar with surveys  
▪ Some people feel more comfortable responding to a survey than participating in an interview  
▪ Tabulation of closed-ended responses is an easy and straightforward process | ▪ Survey respondents may not complete the survey resulting in low response rates  
▪ Items may not have the same meaning to all respondents  
▪ Size and diversity of sample will be limited by people’s ability to read  
▪ Given lack of contact with respondent, never know who really completed the survey  
▪ Unable to probe for additional details  
▪ Good survey questions are hard to write and they take considerable time to develop and hone |
|---|---|---|
| Town Hall Meetings and Other Large Group Events | ▪ Can gather large amount of data at one time  
▪ Allows respondents to describe the issues that are important to them  
▪ Provides a venue where people can build on each others’ knowledge | ▪ Organizing the event takes time and resources  
▪ Definitely need to have a draw to get people to attend in the form of incentives  
▪ Need to have access to people with good facilitation skills  
▪ Need to have “ducks in a row” to ensure attendance at event |
| Case Studies | ▪ Fully depicts people’s experience in program input, process, and results  
▪ Powerful way of portraying program to outsiders | ▪ Usually quite time consuming to collect information, organize and analyze it  
▪ Represents depth of information rather than breadth |
| Illustrated Presentations – Photo Voice, Power Voice | ▪ Fun to do and easier to get people involved because it doesn’t seem “researchy”  
▪ Especially useful as a way to get people of different cultures involved or people who are more visual than verbal  
▪ Powerful way to represent data – “A picture is worth a | ▪ Takes some technological skill/expertise to “produce” the presentation  
▪ Need to have good facilitation skills given that these methods are group work processes  
▪ May not speak to stakeholders who prefer more quantitative approach to data collection and may not be appropriate in |
thousand words.”

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<tr>
<th>Situations where numbers are needed</th>
<th>Skits, Dramatizations, Other Visual Representations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• An alternative approach to linear models of evaluation that may not fit well cross-culturally</td>
<td>• Takes some courage for people who aren’t accustomed to public display</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Useful methods when part of the evaluation purpose is to move toward some form of action</td>
<td>• May not speak to stakeholders who prefer more quantitative approach to data collection and may not be appropriate in situations where numbers are needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fun, innovative approach to evaluation that causes people to view program through another perspective</td>
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**Sources**

