

INFORMATION COLLECTION TOOLS – ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Information Collection Tools	Advantages	Disadvantages
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information may be inapplicable, disorganized, unavailable or out of date ▪ Could be biased because of selective survival of information ▪ Information may be incomplete or inaccurate ▪ Can be time consuming to collect, review, and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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Useful for gaining insight and context into a topic ▪ Allows respondents to describe what is important to them ▪ Useful for gathering quotes and stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Susceptible to interview bias ▪ Time consuming and expensive compared to other data collection methods ▪ May seem intrusive to the respondent
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fully depicts people's experience in program input, process, and results ▪ Powerful way of portraying program to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Usually quite time consuming to collect information, organize and analyze it ▪ Represents depth of information rather than breadth
Illustrated Presentations – Photo Voice, Power Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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.”	situations where numbers are needed
Skits, Dramatizations, Other Visual Representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An alternative approach to linear models of evaluation that may not fit well cross-culturally ▪ Useful methods when part of the evaluation purpose is to move toward some form of action ▪ Fun, innovative approach to evaluation that causes people to view program through another perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Takes some courage for people who aren’t accustomed to public display ▪ May not speak to stakeholders who prefer more quantitative approach to data collection and may not be appropriate in situations where numbers are needed

SOURCES

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- Russ-Eft, D., & Preskill, H. (2001). *Evaluation in Organizations*. New York: Basic Books.