

Overview of Methods to Collect Information

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
questionnaires, surveys, checklists	when need to quickly and/or easily get lots 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 analyze -administer to many people -can get lots of data -many sample questionnaires already exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -might not get careful feedback -wording can bias client's responses -are impersonal -in surveys, may need sampling expert - doesn't get full story
interviews	when want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -get full range and depth of information -develops relationship with client -can be flexible with client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -can take much time -can be hard to analyze and compare -can be costly -interviewer can bias client's responses
documentation review	when want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -get comprehensive and historical information -doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program -information already exists -few biases about information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -often takes much time -info may be incomplete -need to be quite clear about what looking for -not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists
observation	to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -view operations of a program 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 program participants -can be expensive

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 depth of information in short time - can convey key information about programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -can be hard to analyze responses -need good facilitator for safety and closure -difficult to schedule 6-8 people together
case studies	to fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -fully depicts client's experience in program input, process and results -powerful means to portray program to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe -represents depth of information, rather than breadth