



Selecting Data Collection Methods

Once you have clear and focused evaluation questions, the next step is to decide from where/whom you will get the data to answer your evaluation questions. Example data sources include documents, individuals, and observations. Then you can decide on which data collection methods to use and should consider the following when selecting your methods.

Purpose of the evaluation:

What method(s) seems most appropriate for the purpose of your evaluation and the evaluation questions that you want answered?

Users of the evaluation:

Will the method(s) allow you to gather information that can be analyzed and presented in a way that will be seen as credible by your stakeholders?

Respondents from whom you will collect the data:

Where and how can respondents best be reached? What is the culturally and linguistically appropriate method to use? Is conducting a personal interview or a survey more appropriate for certain target populations? Do the data already exist, in program or health care data systems?

Resources available (time, money, volunteers, travel expenses, supplies):

Which method(s) can you afford and manage? What resource allocation is feasible? Consider when results are needed, your own abilities, costs of hiring a consultant, and other resource issues.

Degree of intrusiveness:

Will the method(s) disrupt the program or be seen as intrusive by the respondents? Also consider issues of confidentiality if the information you are seeking is sensitive.

Type of Information:

Do you want representative information that applies to all participants (standardized information, such as from a survey that will be comparable across locations)? Or, do you want to examine the range and diversity of experiences, or tell a story about your target population(s) or a program component?

Advantages and disadvantages of each method:

What are the key strengths and weaknesses of each? Consider issues such as time and respondent burden, cost, necessary infrastructure, and access to records. What is most appropriate for your evaluation needs?

For more information and examples, see Step 4.2 in the Practical Use of Program Evaluation among STD Programs manual.
<http://www.cdc.gov/std/program/pupestd.htm>



Types of Data Collection Methods

There are various methods for collecting data. Some examples of data collection methods and their advantages and disadvantages are summarized below. Data collection methods may also include use of existing data and data sets.

METHOD	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anonymous completion possible• Can administer to groups of people at the same time• Can be efficient and cost effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forced choices may miss certain responses from participants• Wording may bias responses• Impersonal
Interviews (individual/ in-depth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can build rapport with participant• Can prove to get additional information• Can get breadth or depth of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time consuming• Expensive• Interviewing styles and wording may affect responses
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can get common impressions quickly• Can be an efficient way to get breadth and depth of information in a short time frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need experienced facilitator• Can be difficult and costly to schedule a group of 6–8 people• Time consuming to analyze responses
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can view program operations as they occur	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficult to interpret observed behaviors• May influence behaviors of program participants• May be expensive and time consuming to record each individual event
Document Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can document historical information about your program• Does not interrupt program routine• Information already exists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May be time consuming• Available information may be incomplete• Gathering information is dependent on quality of records kept

