innovation network
TRANSFORMING EVALUATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Data Collection Workbook

Data Collection: 3 Steps

1. Choose the source of information
2. Choose the method
3. Determine the level of effort involved in using that method with those people

Guide to Data Collection Methods

Table of Contents

Introduction

This workbook offers an **overview of** data collection methods and pointers for program evaluation. After using this workbook, we hope you will understand:

- The various data collection methods and their advantages and disadvantages.
- The complexities involved in creating your own data collection instruments.

You may use this document as:

- A stand-alone guide on the pros and cons of different data collection methods.
- As an extra resource to use with Innovation Network's online Evaluation Plan Builder at www.innonet.org/pointk, and/or
- As a supplement to Innovation Network's in-person training on data collection.

Refresher: What is Evaluation?

Evaluation is **the systematic collection of information** about a program that enables stakeholders to better understand the program, improve its effectiveness, and/or make decisions about future programming. This workbook focuses on data collection—the "systematic collection" part of evaluation.

For many people, data collection can be the most daunting part of an evaluation. It's important to carefully consider different methods and choose the most practical ones. You don't need to be a statistician or professional evaluator to collect quality data, but you do need well-designed data collection instruments suited to your requirements and capacities. This workbook will take you through basic concepts about data collection and (we hope) demystify the different methods of gathering of information.

Some Definitions

These are some terms that are used frequently in data collection.

- **"Qualitative** data" is described in terms of **quality**. Qualitative data collection is most useful when you would like information in people's own words, or when the questions you are asking have too many possible answers for you to be able to list them. Qualitative data are more time-consuming to analyze than quantitative data, but they can be a worthwhile and important part of a data collection effort. Qualitative data add texture and richness, help tell the story of your programs in ways that numbers rarely can.

- **"Quantitative** data" is described in terms of **quantity or number**. Quantitative data are collected through closed-ended questions, where users are given a limited number of answer choices, or asked to answer on a scale. While quantitative data collection is most obviously suitable for collecting numeric data (such as age, income, number of staff, number of children, etc.), many types of information can be collected quantitatively if placed on a scale.

- **"Population"** is a word that evaluators and researchers use to mean the whole pool of people or organizations a survey is targeting. For example, for an employee survey, the population would be "all employees." For a community survey, everyone who lives in the community is part of the population.

- **"Respondent"** means "a person who has responded to a survey or taken a test."

Data Collection Methods

Once you know what you want to measure (which we hope you decided while working on your evaluation plan), you'll need to identify the **method** to collect data about each measurement target. As you go through the process of selecting your data collection strategy, keep two goals in mind:

- **Minimize the number** of data collection instruments you use, and
- **Maximize the amount** of information you collect from each one.

When deciding on the best data collection method to obtain the information you need, think about:

- What / who will be the source of your information? Consider any documents or people that might have information about your program. What information do you already have?

- Which methods are best suited to obtain information from your sources? (For example, an email survey wouldn't be helpful for people who don't have reliable Internet access.)
- Which methods will be least disruptive to your program and to the people your serve?
- Which methods can you both afford and implement well? How difficult are they (low, medium, or high level of effort)?

The most common data collection methods fall into the following broad categories:
- Document review
- Collecting written responses from people
  - Surveys
  - Journals
  - Tests and assessments
- Talking to people
  - Interview
  - Focus Group
- Observation
- Pictorial/Multimedia

A. Document Review

Systematic analysis of program documents can be among the most efficient and least costly ways of evaluating a program. This type of evaluation does not require the involvement of program participants, and requires very little in terms of administrative or logistical overhead.

Start with your own program records—the documents you use to keep track of your program's implementation, such as applications and attendance logs. Other existing records—records that were created for another purpose, whether by your organization or by external sources—can also be a valuable source of information. Using existing documents can save time and money. Examples of existing records include:

- Attendance records
- Application or admission forms
- Event feedback forms
- Meeting minutes
- Quarterly or annual reports
- Case notes or client records

- Training descriptions
- Grant proposals
- Report cards
- Health records (immunizations, past illnesses)
- Budgets

Document review is a common method of collecting data in evaluating the implementation of your program. It often offers useful details for assessing a program's activities and outputs.

However, this method is limited by the quantity and quality of the documents that your program collects. For example, your program may have mandatory attendance logs for all participants. However, if 80% of these logs aren't filled out correctly, you probably can't get much quality data from them. If you have fully completed attendance logs, you can extract quality program data such as the number of participants served and, if applicable, the number of returning participants.

Table 1: Document Review Pros and Cons		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
• Attendance records • Data for local, state or federal funders • Journals • Maintenance records • Budgets • Performance paperwork	• Typically already have the information – don't have to go collect it • Often quantitative and easy to use • Cheaper to obtain than most other methods	• Data may not be accurate • Not flexible; limited to what already exists

Exercise: What are my potential sources of information?
Think about where to find information about your program. What documents exist with program data in them? What people could you ask for information about your program? Write as many potential sources here as you can.

B. Collecting Written Responses: There are several ways of collecting written information. Each is summarized below, with details in the following pages.

- **Surveys**: A survey is a structured questionnaire to collect standardized information—that is, each person who takes the survey is asked exactly the same questions. Surveys may be mailed on paper, e-mailed, or completed online, by telephone, or in-person.
- **Journals:** This method involves recording events and observations over time, usually to obtain the personal perspective of the writer. The stories that come through journals can be very rich and valuable to the overall evaluation process and are a great way of assessing changes in attitudes.
- **Tests:** Tests are specifically used to assess knowledge, skill, or performance. Tests can be written, oral, or activity-based (such as a driver's test). Pre- and post-event tests (for example, tests taken before and after a training course)work well to measure knowledge gained from a program activity.

1. Surveys

Surveys are a common method used to collect uniform information efficiently from a large number of people. They can yield both quantitative information that is easy to analyze, and qualitative data that enriches evaluation results.

"Units of Analysis": The place to begin any survey is with a clear statement of whom or what you are surveying. Survey professionals call this the unit of analysis. Usually, this unit will be an individual, but sometimes it may be a family, an organization, or even a city or town. Your survey will seek to learn more about this "unit," asking questions about certain characteristics or properties, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Examples of Units of Analysis	
Unit of Analysis	**Common Properties**
Individuals	Age; Education; Number of children; Attitudes towards issues; Patterns of behavior
Family units	Age of head of household; Family income; Number of children
Nonprofit service providers	Total budget; Number of employees; Number of people served
Industry associations or Issue-advocacy coalitions	Total membership; Date founded; Date of last strategic plan; Number of board members

Survey Question Types: Most questions fall into one of the following categories:

- **Knowledge questions** assess the degree to which a "respondent" (the person answering the survey) possesses **certain knowledge, facts, or understanding**. Knowledge questions can sometimes read like "test questions." If you are evaluating a museum program, for example, you might ask questions about whether visitors had absorbed the content of a particular exhibit. For other programs, you might ask a respondent whether he or she is familiar with certain concepts or specific components of your program.

- **Attitude questions** uncover respondents' **opinions or feelings**. They are among the most common questions in surveys. Questions seeking customer, participant, or employee satisfaction are typical examples. If your evaluation is focused on similar kinds of issues, or if the program is designed to create attitude change, then your survey will probably include many of these questions.

- **Behavior questions** probe **what people actually do** or have done in the past. Do not confuse attitude questions with behavior questions. While people do sometimes act according to their opinions, they also act despite them. For example, even though I know that broccoli is good for me ("knowledge"), I don't eat it more than once a month ("behavior"). If you are trying to learn what people **do**, you need to ask directly.

- **Subject characteristics** include typical demographic questions such as age, ethnicity, level of education, and income. They may also include questions related to a respondent's experience in your program (e.g., did they attend the morning or the afternoon training session? Have they been in the program for six months or for a full year?).

More information about survey design and deployment is included in Appendices 1-3.

☑ Exercise: Question Types

Match the question with the correct question type (answers below)

Question Type	Question
Knowledge Question	1. How satisfied are you with your present job?
Attitude Question	2. What was the length of time of your most recent hospitalization?
Behavior Question	3. What is the name of your congressional representative?
Subject Characteristics	4. Over the last two weeks, how many meals have you eaten outside of your own home?

Survey Question Formats: Survey questions are either "open-ended" or "close-ended."

- **Open-ended questions** allow respondents to enter either text or numbers without the use of predetermined answer categories. They are particularly useful when the survey designer does not know the appropriate response categories for a question, or when there are too many possible responses to list.

- **Closed-ended questions** provide respondents with a set of **predetermined answer choices.** Closed-ended questions are easier to analyze and therefore appear on surveys more frequently, but they may not capture the full range of respondents' thoughts on a topic. They may also be easier for respondents to answer because they do not require the time and effort to craft thoughtful responses. However, some respondents may prefer to express their thoughts in their own words. For best results, know your population when choosing question formats.

Closed-ended questions can be further divided into three categories: "choice questions", "rating questions", and "matrix questions".

Choice questions ask respondents to **pick one or more answers** from a list of options. Here is an example:

Where did you FIRST hear about the Children's Alliance (check only one)?

- ☐ Community meeting
- ☐ Flyer
- ☐ Newspaper story
- ☐ Online story
- ☐ A friend (in person)
- ☐ A friend (online)
- ☐ Other _____

Rating questions ask respondents to **indicate their degree** of feeling about something or the degree to which they do something. They use a scale of some sort, such as a continuum from lowest to highest. Questions with more answer choices (a more detailed scale) allow for more specific answers and more accurate data, but require more analysis and interpretation by the evaluator. For example, consider the same question and two possible sets of answer choices:

How would you rate the strength of Candidate Smith's responses in last night's debate?

Strong	Weak	Unsure
☐	☐	☐

- or -

Very weak	Weak	Neither weak nor strong	Strong	Very strong	Unsure
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Using responses to the first set of answer choices, an evaluator could easily report which category was most often chosen by respondents. For example, "42% of respondents thought the candidate's responses were weak." On the other hand, an evaluator could choose to use the second set of answer choices, which may produce more nuanced results. For example, "42% of respondents thought the candidate's responses were weak (either weak or very weak). Of the 42%, though, 37 of the 42 respondents thought the candidate was "weak" (versus "very weak"): possibly, respondents are not strongly polarized against the candidate and may be able to be swayed."

Another factor to consider in designing a rating scale is the "neutral choice". Consider the two answer scales below:

How satisfied were you with the amount of time you had to wait before seeing a caseworker?

Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
☐	☐	☐	☐

- or -

Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Answer Scale 1 forces a respondent to choose a side—to express a negative or positive opinion. Answer Scale 2 gives respondents the option of choosing a neutral position.

Matrix Questions or a "grid" can be an efficient way of getting answers on a lot of questions, as long as they all use the same scale. For example:

How often have you used the listed features on the community website?

	Never	*Once or twice*	*Three to five times*	*Six to ten times*	*More than ten times*
"Ask Annie" column	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
"Best Bets" vendor reviews	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
"Coffee Shop" forums	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
"Dave's Den" blog	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2.   Journals

Journaling involves the keeping of a diary or journal by the research subject (usually your client, but it may also be a staff member, board member, or other stakeholder). Journaling is a cheap, non-intrusive way to collect qualitative data about your program.

Journals can help a researcher understand the perspectives of participants, know intended and unintended consequences of program implementation, and receive "insider information." Knowing the program from the perspectives of participants can allow you to understand program inputs, processes, outcomes, and impacts more thoroughly. Journals are one of the best ways to gather stories, but they can be difficult and time-consuming to analyze, especially if the journal-writer didn't have clear instructions (e.g., "Write in your journal at least once a week about how you are doing with the program").

3.   Tests & Assessments

Tests and assessments (also known as standardized tests) can be used in program evaluation to collect quantifiable information about the program or its participants. Tests ask knowledge-based questions for which there is only one correct answer, rather than asking for opinions or perceptions of the program. Skills tests assess skills for which there is a right and a wrong way of doing something (e.g., during a driver's test, you must stop at stop signs; not stopping means you fail the test). Tests can also gather data about achievement and physiological or psychological characteristics.

Tests are great for gathering a lot of quantitative information, and can be used to compare respondents' answers over time. However, since tests don't allow for opinions, they may not reflect the nuances of your program. It takes a certain amount of expertise to develop, administer, and analyze a test. Finally, tests only reflect knowledge or skills, not behavior or condition. (Think of the broccoli example again: I have the **knowledge** that I should eat broccoli often, but in my **behavior** I eat it rarely. Or in a skills test: Just because I stopped at all the stop signs during my driver's test doesn't mean I have never run a stop sign.)

Pros and cons of the written information methods are summarized in Table 3 on the next page; more information can be found in Appendix 4.

Table 3: Written Responses Pros and Cons Summary		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
• Surveys • Questionnaires • Paper Tests Note: These instruments can be on paper (in person or by mail), over the telephone, emailed, or online.	• Collect uniform information relatively quickly and easily. • Can be given anonymously so people are more open to sharing their true opinions • Much less time consuming to collect information from large numbers of people than the "Talking to People" methods. • Good for collecting quantitative data, which is easier to analyze, e.g. closed ended and short answer questions.	• Respondents must be literate in the language of the survey • Responses are not guaranteed (e.g., 100 surveys sent out and only three returned) • Can't follow up on answers as easily as in an interview. Not as rich an array of answers.
• Journals	• Excellent for collecting rich, contextual, qualitative information • Relatively non-invasive	• Can be inconsistent or difficult to analyze

C.   Talking to People

The methods in this section are used to collect spoken responses from program participants and other stakeholders in the program. When planning an evaluation, most people consider talking with program participants. They are the people who benefit most directly, and they can offer important insight into a program. But consider other stakeholders who may have knowledge and insight to share, such as:

- Parents of school-age participants
- Program staff, administrators and volunteers
- Staff of "sister agencies" and partners
- Funders
- People who have left the program
- Policy makers
- Experts in the field

You can collect spoken responses in a variety of ways:

1.   Interviews
Interviewing a group of program participants and other stakeholders is a common method of collecting qualitative data. Interviews allow you to ask questions that explain trends and explore perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings.

Interviews vary in length, but generally are no longer than an hour. Interviews can be structured (follow a set list of questions) or unstructured (free-flowing) in design. Interviews generally seek input from one individual or from a small group.

Interviews are often recorded (on tape or digitally) for later transcription. Recording the interview allows the interviewer to focus on the discussion rather than on note-taking. It also ensures accuracy of participant comments included in reports and publications.

The drawbacks of interviews: If an interview is unstructured, valuable information can be missed. Unstructured interviews are also difficult to analyze and replicate—that is, two people might talk about completely different things during an interview, so you can't draw comparisons between the two. A structured interview (with a set list of discussion questions) can still be time-consuming to analyze. Interviews are also potentially expensive and logistically complex (you may need to hire a trained interviewer and/or transcriber, have a place to conduct the interview, and buy or gain access to reliable recording equipment).

Focus Groups

A focus group is a small group of people (usually fewer than 15) with something in common who discuss their opinions and provide suggestions on a specific topic under the guidance of a facilitator. A focus group usually lasts an hour or two. It's best to have two researchers staffing the focus group: one to serve as the facilitator/moderator, and the other (the "assistant") to take notes and manage recording equipment (if used).

Participation in a focus group should be voluntary—you're unlikely to get honest input if the participants are required to be there. All of the participants should share some key characteristic, such as high school students attending the same after-school program, couples with children in childcare, or directors of nonprofit organizations. If possible, participants should have a diversity of opinions to stimulate discussion.

Most focus groups follow a guide or protocol—a kind of script for the facilitator. It identifies the key topics to touch on during the discussion, to put participants at ease so they feel comfortable sharing varied opinions.

Table 4: Talking to People Pros and Cons Summary		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
• Interviews (including intake and exit interviews) • Focus Groups • Discussion Groups • Can be conducted in person or over the telephone (or in some cases online)	• Provides more information than written surveys (can follow up on particular questions and probe more deeply) • Natural form of information - sharing. People can speak freely, without feeling boxed in by a standardized survey. • Useful if people don't have good reading and writing skills • Can use groups to stimulate conversation and feedback	• Can be very time consuming. • Can be labor intensive to set up and analyze data. • Typically produce a lot of qualitative data that is more time consuming to analyze than quantitative data. • Not anonymous, so some people may be hesitant to share their true opinions • Must be careful not to bias answers through interview procedure – consider getting interviewer training or hiring an experienced interviewer.

Observation

Observation is an in-person study of a program activity (such as a class, a playground, a court hearing, or an intake process), conducted by a person not otherwise involved in the process. This method can provide a unique perspective on how a program runs and how different players interact.

Typically, observations are conducted using a checklist (or "structured observation sheet") to ensure accuracy, thoroughness, and consistency. For example, if two evaluators observe the same after-school program, they are likely to notice different things unless they have a checklist telling them to watch for particular events (e.g., in a classroom, count the number of times a child asks a question).

Ideally, an observer should not affect the situation—the point is to see what would be happening even if the observer were not present. This means observers should not interact with other people in the situation they are observing. This can be difficult for someone who is not an experienced observer.

Observers must often rely on their own perceptions of the observed activities. Because of this, observation is more susceptible to bias than other data collection methods. This problem can be reduced by using multiple observers, who can

each can cross-check the others' findings to discuss and eliminate possibly inaccurate interpretations.

Some researchers believe that information learned from observation is merely anecdotal and not "real" or reliable, because the activities observed may have occurred by chance. To eliminate this possibility as much as possible, conduct observations at different days, times, and places if possible, and by different researchers. This may not be possible if there is only one site or the activity can only be observed at one specific time.

Overall, observation is a very strong research method. Because researchers do not directly interact with participants, it is considered non-intrusive and can be conducted inconspicuously. However, since it takes experience to collect data through observation, you may need to hire a consultant to conduct the observation.

Table 5: Observation Pros and Cons		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
• Observing community • Community change • Observe/document group activities • Observe/document workshop participants	• Non-intrusive. • Doesn't require much effort by participants • Easier than asking people to fill out a survey or participate in an interview	• Collect limited kinds of data through observations • Can take a lot of time • Can be challenging to ensure consistency and to interpret

Exercise: How difficult would observation be for me or my organization? Do program staff have the time and ability to be good observers, or can we afford a hired observer?

Multimedia

Photographs, videos and other visual forms of artwork help convey meaning in a way that numbers and words cannot. They can display a vast amount of meaning in a limited amount of space ("a picture is worth a thousand words"). Pictures and videos can provide a snapshot of a program at a particular point in time. Photos can also make reports more compelling for readers, thereby possibly increasing the likelihood that the findings will be put to use.

Evaluators can use pictures to elicit reactions and interpretations from interviewees, survey takers, or focus group participants.

Here are three ways you can incorporate the use of pictures, artwork, and video into your data collection efforts:

- *Guided Collection*: Pictures and videos can guide your data collection process. They can reduce the amount of information that needs to be asked of program participants. For example, pictures may be able to convey the approximate age, gender, and ethnicity of program participants, allowing the evaluator to use his or her time talking with or surveying participants for more in-depth information. Pictures can also illustrate certain behaviors or outcomes demonstrating concepts like collaboration, engagement, participation, etc.

- *Participant-collected/created data*: This method engages program participants either to create photographs, video, or drawings that represent their attitudes, beliefs, or feelings about a certain event or concept. Drawing as a form of data collection is an especially powerful qualitative technique when working with children. Through drawings, children are often able to express their thoughts or feelings about particular issues that they can't express in words.

- *Photo Interviewing*: This method involves asking interview respondents to react to and provide interpretations of photographs. Photo interviewing can be an effective tool that can help trigger participant memories and lead to new perspectives and interpretations.

Table 6: Multimedia Pros and Cons		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
Pictorial Multimedia	• Can add depth to traditional evaluation techniques • Can help one to remember if visiting multiple sites or programs • Can clearly show differences from beginning to end	• Concrete analysis can be difficult • Requires more resources than some written techniques
Exercise: What resources would my organization need in order to use multimedia data collection methods?		

Finalizing Your Data Collection Methods

The last step in developing your Evaluation Plan is to finalize the data collection methods you will use. This step is important, because you may find that you initially identified too many data collection instruments, or instruments that are too difficult, time consuming, or expensive given your available human and financial resources. To finalize your data collection methods:

1) Choose the three to five questions that are most important to answer.
2) Choose data collection methods that will provide the most information with the least effort.

Evaluation is about trade-offs. Ask yourself whether the information you will get is worth the expense in time and resources that it will take to get it (both your time and your participants/clients).

Here are several ways to minimize your data collection effort and costs:

- *Start with what you are already doing!* One way to get a great deal of information with a minimum of effort is to use existing data collection instruments. Before you think about creating data collection instruments, ask yourself, "Does our organization already collect this information?" You may be surprised; your organization may already collect a lot of information to monitor activities and meet reporting requirements. For example, in the provision of your services, you may use intake and referral forms, keep client records, or track your inventory. These are valuable sources of evaluation information. You may want to conduct an "information audit" to assess what you collect and for what purpose, to identify overlaps and maybe even reduce the number of ways that you collect the same information.

- Capitalize on what you've got. Once you identify the data collection instruments you already use, you may be able to "beef up" those instruments to collect additional information with very little extra effort. For example, when people register for the Point K Learning Center, we not only ask them for their name and email address, but also their postal code and for information about where they heard about us and what kind of organization they work with. Just a few extra questions on the form means we have data on where Point K users are and what kind of work they do.

- *Use or modify existing instruments that have been developed by other organizations.* In recent years, there has been an effort within sectors of the nonprofit community to share information. One of the most exciting results of such efforts is the increasing availability of data collection instruments produced by others and made available for use by the field. We urge you to explore whether there are instruments available in your field.

- *Avoid methods that require a "high" level of effort.* Only select data collection methods that require "high" levels of effort when the information you will obtain is worth the effort—that is, it answers one of your most important evaluation questions, and you can't get it any other way.

When choosing methods, review several other factors. Be sure the data collection methods are appropriate for those who will be participating in the evaluation. (Consider language barriers, literacy and education levels, cultural privacy concerns, etc.) Also reflect honestly on whether you have the resources—the time, expertise, or ability to hire help—to implement the plan.

Conclusion

This workbook is not meant to teach you how to design an accurate and complete survey on your own. We don't expect you to be able to run a focus group or conduct observation just because you read this far. If you are interested in learning more about how to develop data collection instruments yourself, the appendices below might be useful. The Resources section at the Point K Learning Center also holds a wealth of tips and guides to teach you more.

Appendix 1: Advice on Survey Design

If you are interested in trying to develop your own survey, here are a few tips.

Question Design
- Where possible, use closed-ended questions. (This makes analysis of your data less time consuming.)
- It's important that the answers for a choice question do not overlap (this is called "mutual exclusivity"). For example, the answer choices "newspaper story" and "in the media" would not be mutually exclusive.
- Also ensure that answer choices include the **full range** of possible answers. For example, a set of answers that offered "Never," "1-5 years," and "10 or more years" does not include answers that might be less than one year, or more than five but less than ten years.
- Eliminate any ambiguities in your questions and responses.
- Remember that rating questions with longer scales generally give better data, but will take more effort to analyze.
- Determine whether you want to allow neutral responses. Researchers debate the wisdom and utility of such "neutral versus non-neutral" responses. We recommend that you consider your audience, the question, and the context. If respondents may legitimately have no opinion or no feelings about a topic, forcing them to take a positive or negative stand may cause them to skip the question or answer inaccurately. If you worry that too many respondents will choose neutral responses rather than expressing true choices, you may want to use a scale that forces a choice, or you may want to spend more time encouraging honest responses and explaining confidentiality.

Survey Formatting
When a survey is easy for respondents to follow, they are more likely to fill out the instrument correctly. If respondents have trouble reading the survey, they may answer inaccurately (by checking the wrong box, for example), skip questions, or refuse to complete the instrument altogether. Your time spent on formatting will be rewarded with higher response rates and greater accuracy.

Here are some layout tips you may want to consider as you create your survey.

- Make sure your instructions and questions are clear, and written in a style your audience will understand.
- Give your respondents' eyes a chance to rest. For paper surveys, leave plenty of white space around each question and around the page margins. For online surveys, avoid bright color schemes, and put just a few questions on each screen.
- Line up the pieces of your survey consistently—tables and tabs can be a big help.
- If a question is cut in half by a page break, move it to the next page. (It's better to have more white space than a broken question.)
- Matrix or grid questions are particularly efficient and easy for respondents to follow.
- Group similar questions together under sub-headings (e.g., "About You", "About Your Experiences").
- For paper surveys, try to minimize branching questions (i.e., those questions that ask respondents to skip ahead out of sequence if they answer in a particular way). If you must employ them, provide ample guidance so that respondents do not get lost in the skip pattern. (Branching questions are fine in an online survey, since the branching is invisible to the person filling out the survey. Not all online surveys let you branch, however.)
- Wait until the end of a survey to ask any sensitive questions (about personal habits or risky behaviors, for example). This gives respondents time to "warm up" to answering your questions.

Following some of these suggestions may result in a survey that is longer in its page count than you would like. For a paper survey, more pages lead to greater expense for printing and mailing. However, better design can yield more accurate data and a higher response rate.

Appendix 2: Survey Distribution Methods

Once you have determined your survey questions, you'll need to decide on a method for distribution. The following two pages provide a quick overview of the most common methods.

Survey Distribution Methods		
Survey Method	**Description**	**Advantages/Disadvantages**
Mail-based self-reported paper and pencil survey	A common survey approach. Respondents receive a paper survey in the mail. They complete the survey on their own and return it to the sponsor in a provided pre-paid envelope.	▪ Lends itself to a do-it-yourself approach. ▪ Longer surveys can be expensive, as printing and mailing costs increase. ▪ Requires accurate address information. ▪ Response rates can be low if no follow-up with non-respondents is done. ▪ Cost of data entry can be significant.
In-person self-reported paper and pencil survey	Similar to a mail survey, except that surveys are completed and handed in on site.	▪ Least expensive approach. ▪ Difficult to get an accurate random sample of respondents, which compromises ability to draw conclusions about everyone involved in your program. ▪ Requires that participants have the time, while on site, to complete the instrument.
In-person survey with interviewer	Usually a paper survey, although it may use direct data input either into a computer or PDA. The interviewer is present to assist the respondent, for example, by helping a respondent who has difficulty reading, or by explaining complicated questions.	▪ Can be costly if interviewer is paid. ▪ Best if you expect that respondents may not have the ability to read your survey.
Telephone survey	Respondents are contacted on the telephone by an interviewer who reads closed-ended questions and records answers either on paper or directly into a computer.	▪ Convenient because it is often outsourced. ▪ Can be costly. ▪ Telephone contact may annoy participants.

Survey Distribution Methods		
Survey Method	**Description**	**Advantages/Disadvantages**
Internet or web-based survey	Similar to a paper and pencil survey, except that it is presented through an Internet browser. Respondents may be invited to take the survey by email or postal mail. Once the survey has been completed, answers are either emailed for processing or stored in a database for later retrieval.	▪ Low cost and high level of convenience for researchers and respondents. ▪ You and your respondents need reliable Internet access. ▪ Little ability to generalize survey results to all participants if you use an open survey on your organization's website.

Appendix 3: Strategies for Increasing Response Rate

Low response rates are one of the biggest problems associated with surveys. Without a strategy to maximize responses, you should expect to see only 15 to 30 percent of the surveys you distribute returned; ideally, you want 60 to 80 percent response rates.

Here are some common strategies to maximize survey response rates. This guide is only a starting point based on Innovation Network's experiences: Not every element of this approach will be relevant to every survey project, and some may prove too burdensome for your organization.

- Publicize your survey: Include information about it in your newsletter, tell people about it in meetings, and post a flyer about it at your facility.
- Give advance notice: Send respondents a letter, post card, or email a week in advance, telling them they have been selected to receive the survey.
- Personalize it: Send a personally addressed letter or email to each respondent along with the survey itself. Explain the purpose of the survey in the letter emphasizing the importance and the benefits of filling it out.
- Stamp it: For paper surveys, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for respondents to return a mailed survey in. Never expect that respondents will stamp the return envelopes themselves.
- Incentives: Include a token gift with each survey, or offer people a chance to enter a prize drawing. Such incentives are surprisingly effective, and may pay for themselves if they reduce the costs of following up with non-respondents.
- Reminders:
  - Send a reminder to non-respondents one week after the "return-by" date of your survey.
  - Send a second copy of the survey one week after the reminder (or two weeks after the initial survey, if you didn't send a reminder). Include a note reminding the non-responder of the importance of the survey.
- Follow up: If possible, telephone non-responders to learn why they failed to respond. Offer to send them another survey if they express interest in completing the instrument.

Appendix 4: Summary of Common Data Collection Methods[1]

Document Review		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
- Attendance records - Data for local, state or federal funders - Journals - Maintenance records - Budgets - Performance paperwork	- Typically already have the information – don't have to go collect it - Often quantitative and easy to use - Cheaper to obtain than most other methods	- If staff members do not feel the data are used, then they may not be accurate. - Not flexible; limited to what already exists

Observe		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
- Observing community - Community change - Observe/document group activities - Observe/document workshop participants	- Non-intrusive. - Doesn't require much effort by participants - Easier than asking people to fill out a survey or participate in an interview	- Collect limited kinds of data through observations - Can take a lot of time - Can be challenging to ensure consistency and to interpret

Collect Written Responses		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*

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[1] Drawn in part from Carter MacNamara's Free Management Library, http://www.mapnp.org/library/research/overview.htm

• Surveys • Questionnaires • Paper Tests Note: These instruments can be on paper (in person or by mail), over the telephone, emailed, or online.	• Collect uniform information relatively quickly and easily. • Can be given anonymously so people are more open to sharing their true opinions • Much less time consuming to collect information from large numbers of people than the "Talking to People" methods. • Good for collecting quantitative data, which is easier to analyze, e.g. closed ended and short answer questions.	• Respondents must be literate in the language of the survey • Responses are not guaranteed (e.g., 100 surveys sent out and only three returned) • Can't follow up on answers as easily as in an interview. Not as rich an array of answers.

Talk to People		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*
• Interviews (including intake and exit interviews) • Focus Groups • Discussion Groups • Can be conducted in person or over the telephone (or in some cases online)	• Provides more information than written surveys (can follow up on particular questions and probe more deeply) • Natural form of information - sharing. People can speak freely, without feeling boxed in by a standardized survey. • Useful if people don't have good reading and writing skills • Can use groups to stimulate conversation and feedback	• Can be very time consuming to talk to people. • Can be labor intensive to set up and analyze data. • Interviews typically have a lot of qualitative date that is more time consuming to analyze than quantitative data. • Not anonymous, so some people may be hesitant to share their true opinions • Must be careful not to bias answers through interview procedure – consider getting interviewer training.

Other Methods		
Examples	*Advantages*	*Disadvantages*

Pictorial Multimedia	• Can add depth to traditional evaluation techniques • Can help one to remember if visiting multiple sites or programs • Can clearly show differences from beginning to end	• Needs to be paired with other methods • Can have different interpretations of pictures if not paired with words