

# Using Qualitative Methods in Your Evaluation



## EXAMINING DATA COLLECTION METHODS

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## A Qualitative Perspective

- The experiences of the sample participants, explained using their own words, strengthen both the validity and credibility of the research
  - Patton, 2002

# Defining the Qualitative Method in Evaluation



- Intent to gather an in-depth understanding of a program or process
  - Interested in meaning and description
    - ✦ Involves the why and the how
  - Allows a deeper look at issues of interest and to explore nuances
- Questions to ask before beginning
  - What do my respondents know that I can discover?
  - How do the respondents classify and describe their experiences?
  - How are these concepts defined by my respondents?



# Defining the Qualitative Method in Evaluation



- **When not to do qualitative**
  - You are only interested in numbers and percentages
    - ✦ The what and not the why
  - You want to generalize your results to a large population
  - You have a large population of clients and you want to hear from as many as possible





## Overview of Presentation

- **Data collection methods**
  - When to choose
  - Effective use
  - Relevant information
  - Advantages & disadvantages

An opportunity to ask questions will be available at the conclusion of each section



## Collection of Data

*How can we get the information we need?*

- **Content Analysis**
  - Examining public and private documents and materials for themes and concepts
- **Focus Groups**
  - Gathering a small group to discuss an issue using a moderator and a set of questions
- **Interviews**
  - Asking questions of another individual in a one-on-one setting.

# Examining Content Analysis



- **When to Choose:**
  - Want to understand the intentions, projections and/or history of a person, organization, or community<sup>1</sup>
  - Number of documents exist that allow you to examine trends and patterns
  - Typically not used in isolation, so time must be available and the technique must speak to the goal
    - ✦ Allows for triangulation to occur within evaluation

# Examining Content Analysis



- **Examples of When to Effectively Use:**
  - Needs assessment
    - ✦ Materials and documents speak to your evaluation goal / issue
  - Outcome evaluation
    - ✦ What has been the effect of the program on the individual or the community?





# Examining Content Analysis



- Intent is to examine communications in whatever forms are available:
  - Program and/or organizational materials, newspaper articles, websites, books, laws, maps, etc.
- Useful technique to determine the focus of a person, group, institution, or community
- Appropriate topics to explore include:
  - ✦ “Who says what...
  - ✦ To whom...
  - ✦ Why...
  - ✦ How”

# Content Analysis: Document and Material Review



## Advantages

- Direct reality of participant available
  - Actual words, language, material, etc. obtained
- Usually unobtrusive
- Saves transcription time and expense
- Convenient timing

## Disadvantages

- Follow-up for additional information unlikely
- Information may be incomplete
- Information may not be authentic or accurate
- Accessibility may be limited or protected

# Focus on Focus Groups



- **When to Choose:**
  - Want to understand experiences, beliefs, viewpoints, and so forth.
  - Looking to explore an issue or get feedback from multiple individuals
    - ✦ More info, broad brush
    - ✦ Generate and/or share ideas
  - Information being gathered isn't sensitive



# Focus on Focus Groups



- **Examples of When to Effectively Use:**
  - Needs assessment
    - ✦ Talk with community members or others to document a need for a particular program or relevant issues within an area
  - Process Evaluation
    - ✦ How is the program working? Is the program serving as intended and in the manner proposed? How can it do better?



# Focus on Focus Groups



- Ideally: moderator, note taker, 6-10 participants
  - 2-3 focus groups per topic
- Should develop a list of discussion questions and then let the discussion of the group develop
- While still structured to a certain extent, focus groups are much more free-form than a traditional interview
  - Important to let the discussion develop naturally and take its normal course



# Focus on Focus Groups



- Find participants that can offer the insight you need to answer your evaluation questions
- Important to take good notes during the focus group session
  - It is crucial to record everyone's responses so that no one's perspective is lost
- Start with the general questions first and then move to the specific ones
- Start with the most important questions first and end with the least important

# Focus Groups



## Advantages

- Presence of moderator
  - Expand or change direction
  - Adapt as necessary
  - View nonverbal cues
- Group participants can interact
- Can be inexpensive

## Disadvantages

- Dominant individuals can influence
- Lack of anonymity
- Can't cover sensitive topics
- Moderator effects and bias
- Challenging to analyze

# Discussing Interviews



- **When to Choose:**
  - Want to gain in-depth individual understanding
    - ✦ Identify detailed personal perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and/or attitudes
    - ✦ Provide insight about how people perceive a situation
  - Information being gathered is sensitive





# Discussing Interviews



- **Examples of When to Effectively Use:**
  - Needs assessment
    - ✦ Key informants can provide relevant, personal perspective about issue, programming
  - Outcome evaluation
    - ✦ Understand ways in which the individual has changed, made progress, been impacted, etc.



# Discussing Interviews



- Quality of information gathered during an interview depends on:
  - How questions are designed
    - ✦ Structured, semi-structured, unstructured
  - How interview session is conducted
    - ✦ Interviewer should be prepared and trained
    - ✦ Pilot and practice
    - ✦ Questions asked as written
  - Recording responses accurately
    - ✦ Whether interview can be recorded or not

# Discussing Interviews



- **Avoid questions that use confusing language**
  - Clear, straight-forward language and no jargon
- **Avoid questions that are too broad or vague**
  - Overwhelmed participants provide general or vague responses
- **Avoid double-barreled questions**
  - Only one gets answered
- **Avoid biased questions**
  - Be impartial in phrasing and then during the asking
    - ✦ Even body language and tone of voice has an impact

# Discussing Interviews



- Clarify interview questions if needed
  - Allows for rephrasing or additional explanation
- Ask follow-up questions if the interview is headed in a direction that is productive for your evaluation
  - If participant goes off on an unexpected tangent, can ask more IF information is useful

# Interviews: Telephone



## Advantages

- Real-time interviewer
  - Clarify, explain and expand (flexibility)
  - Adapt as necessary
- Easier to access geographically diverse sample

## Disadvantages

- Interviewer effect
  - Age, gender
- Nonverbal unavailable
- Limited survey length
- Sample bias
- May need multiple phone calls to reach subjects
  - Time and money

# Interviews: In-Person



## Advantages

- Depth of information obtained
- Presence of interviewer
  - Clarify, explain and expand (flexibility)
  - Adapt as necessary
  - View nonverbal cues
- Complexity allowed
- Higher response rates

## Disadvantages

- Lack of anonymity
- Interviewer effect
  - Age, race, gender
- Interviewer bias
  - Verbal and nonverbal
- Lack of consistency with multiple interviewers
- Cost
  - Time and money





# Questions?



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