



Overview of Common Data Collection Methods

Method	Description	Cost	Uses a flexible format?	Can easily produce quantitative data?	Can easily produce qualitative data?	Has the possibility to produce generalizable information?	Other Considerations
Document Review	Review of existing documents or records, such as project records and reports, policies or standard operating procedures, written correspondence, photos, videos, etc.	Typically low; depends on number of documents reviewed.	✓	✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be difficult to access data • Data may be out of date • May not include the exact data you are looking for • If rules for recordkeeping have changed, trend analysis can be difficult or impossible • Need to learn how records were compiled to assess quality of data
Individual In-depth Interviews	One-on-one conversations with specific individuals who have knowledge about a topic of interest. Typically use an open-ended (<i>semi-structured</i>) format, allowing interviewer to ask follow-up questions and probes to pursue topics in depth.	Typically low; depends on number and duration of interviews conducted, interpretation needs, etc.	✓		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewers must be careful to not bias information • Useful during exploratory stage before designing a structured survey • Findings are about individual experiences or opinions. While common themes might emerge, findings are not generalizable
Focus Group Discussions	Structured interviews with small groups (6-12 individuals), typically using both standardized and follow-up questions, to collect information about people's experiences, feelings, and preferences.	Typically low; depends on number and duration of discussions held, interpretation needs, etc.	✓		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for gathering feedback on a service or product • Gives information on group dynamics • Requires a good facilitator • Discussion can be sidetracked or dominated by a few individuals • Can be difficult to analyze

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Surveys	Systematic collection of information from a defined population. May be <i>self-administered</i> (respondents complete a paper-and-pencil or electronic questionnaire) or <i>enumerated</i> (administered through in-person or phone interviews conducted by someone trained to record responses).	Can be high; depends on sample size and mode of administration (e.g. in-person vs. electronic); on linguistic needs such as translation or interpretation; on training if needed for enumerators; etc.		✓		✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design can take time and often requires testing/piloting • Design requires good knowledge of the subject area as well as specialized skills in survey questionnaire development • Accuracy depends on sample size and who is included • Sample limited to willing and reachable respondents • May have low response rates • Further considerations depend on whether survey is self-administered or administered by an enumerator
Observation	Technique for watching or looking at an event, process or place to get information about it. May be structured or unstructured. Observer uses a form, checklist or other tool to guide what he or she is looking for. Observer documents what he or she sees and analyzes the notes.	Low to high; depends on type and number of observations conducted and training required for staff			✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows an action, process or place to be studied in real-time • May reveal problems or patterns that people are unaware of or unable to describe • Susceptible to observer bias • Those being observed can behave differently because of the presence of the observer • Important to allow sufficient time for observations • Can be difficult to analyze

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