

## Outcomes Data Collection Methods

Method	What is this?	Use when	Strengths	Limitations
Questionnaires	<p>Questionnaires are paper-based or electronic forms that have a series of simple or complex questions for individuals to complete on their own, or with some assistance if necessary or appropriate.</p> <p>The questions asked may be 'closed' or 'open'. Closed questions usually require a single answer (for example, yes, no, don't know or a rating against a given scale). Open questions allow individuals to respond more freely.</p>	<p>You want information from large number of respondents;</p> <p>You know exactly what data you need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Many standardised instruments available;</li> <li>- Can be anonymous;</li> <li>- Allows a large sample;</li> <li>- Standardised responses easy to analyse;</li> <li>- Able to obtain a large amount of data quickly;</li> <li>- Relatively low cost;</li> <li>- Convenient for respondents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sample may not be representative;</li> <li>- May have low return rate;</li> <li>- Wording can bias responses;</li> <li>- Closed-ended and brief responses may not provide the whole story;</li> <li>- Not suitable for all people – e.g.: those with low reading level</li> </ul>
Interview	<p>Interviews are a way of asking a set of questions to individuals or groups either face-to-face or on the telephone. They can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- structured, where questions are pre-set questions and use exact wording</li> <li>- semi-structured, where questioning is more flexible, allowing for a more fluid, responsive and probing interview</li> <li>- unstructured, where the interviewer begins by asking a general question and then encourages the interviewee to talk freely</li> <li>- combined with other methods such as drawings or mind maps to engage interviewees.</li> </ul>	<p>You want to understand impressions and experiences in more detail and be able to expand or clarify responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Often better response rates than surveys;</li> <li>- Allow flexibility in questions</li> <li>- Allow to ask people directly about how things have changed for them</li> <li>- Collect in-depth information about changes in attitudes, feelings and perceptions</li> <li>- Collect information from people who are not literate or are visually impaired</li> <li>- Check that people understand your questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time consuming;</li> <li>- Requires skilled interviewers;</li> <li>- Less anonymity for respondents</li> <li>- Analysis can be difficult with less structured interviews</li> </ul>

Focus group	<p>Focus group is a facilitated discussion usually held with six to eight participants from similar backgrounds. The main emphasis of this method is to collect information which emerges from the interaction between the participants.</p> <p>A facilitator is responsible for guiding the group through a discussion 'focused' on a limited number of questions based on a core topic and making sure that there is a full record of the discussion. Focus groups usually take place over one or two hours.</p>	<p>You want to collect in depth information from a group of people about their experiences and perceptions related to a specific issue;</p> <p>You want people's ideas about what would be better</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collect multiple people's input in one session;</li> <li>- Allows in-depth discussion;</li> <li>- Group interaction can produce greater insights;</li> <li>- Can be conducted in short time frame;</li> <li>- Enjoyable for participants;</li> <li>- Sometimes group members are motivated to take actions as a result of sharing their stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not produce statistics;</li> <li>- Data can be complex to analyse;</li> <li>- Groups can be 'led' by dominating individuals, and controversial or different vies suppressed;</li> <li>- Requires skilled facilitator;</li> <li>- May be difficult to organise;</li> </ul>
<b>Method</b>	<b>What is this?</b>	<b>Use when</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
Observation	<p>Observation involves studying and recording information on changes you see, hear or experience. These changes can be in people's behaviour, attitude or appearance or changes in situations.</p> <p>Observation can be carried out formally, where it is directed through a set of structured criteria or indicators or informally, where information is recorded in a more ad-hoc way.</p>	<p>The information you want is about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual change that is difficult to assess through other means, for example, assessing someone's presentation skills by observing them deliver a mock presentation</li> <li>- people who might find it hard to talk, for example children with learning disabilities</li> <li>- group behaviour, for example young people from different groups talking to each other more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct record of what people do, as distinct from what they say they do;</li> <li>- Can generate data which can then form the basis for discussion with those observed</li> <li>- May identify changes that people themselves are unaware of</li> <li>- May capture information that other tools miss</li> <li>- May not rely on verbal communication or specific language skills</li> <li>- Can be integrated into everyday work or contact with users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focuses on observable behaviour and therefore sheds no light on people's motivations;</li> <li>- Danger of leading to over simplification, or distortion of the meaning of the situation;</li> <li>- The presence of the observer cannot be help but influence the setting they are observing to some extent;</li> <li>- Can generate a lot of data to analyse and they rely on the skills and objectivity of the observer</li> </ul>

		- changes in the environment, for example the reduction of litter on an estate.		
Participatory methods	Participatory methods can be: - Visual methods, such as participants' drawings, collages, photos and video footage. - Interactive verbal feedback, such as participants' diaries and storytelling. - Using diagrams and other creative tools.	You want qualitative information that can often not be accessed by other means and that help you to complement of methods	- Allow different views and perspectives to be captured in specific locations and at specific times; - Can be used for people who may not respond well to interview or questionnaire, or who may not have narrative skills (e.g.: children); - Enjoyable for participants;	- There is a danger of misinterpreting what is meant; - It may not be culturally appropriate; - Some people may feel inhibited to participate for a variety of reasons
Document review	Documents review is about using existing documents (government reports, census data, academic research, etc.) as a source of data on their own. This is usually used combined with other methods.	Programme documents or literature are available and can provide insight into the programme or evaluation	- Data already exist; - Does not interrupt the programme; - Little or no burden on others; - Can provide historical or comparison data; - Introduce little bias; - Can add authority to your study;	- Time consuming; - Data limited to what exists and is available; - Data may be incomplete; - Requires clearly defining the data you are seeking

## Choosing your methods

There are a number of criteria that will influence the methods you choose.

They should be:

- robust
- credible
- fit well with the way you work
- fit well with your user group
- provide good outcomes evidence.

## Will your methods be robust?

Your data collection tools should give you accurate data that you can trust:

- **They should get information clearly relating to what you want to know.** For example, if you want to know how a new community centre is being used, it may be appropriate to monitor the people using it and observe its use. If you want to know what difference it has made to people's lives, you will need to ask them.
- **They should ask the right people the relevant questions.** For example, if you are sending a questionnaire to local residents, will it be completed by people who have lived in the area long enough to be able to tell you about any changes?
- **They should give you reliable data.** This means that if you were to repeat the same exercise with the same person or group in the same circumstances, it would give you a consistent result. This means making sure that different interviewers or observers, for example, understand and apply their questions in the same way.

## Will they be credible with your stakeholders?

It is important to involve stakeholders as much as possible in the process of selecting the methods you are going to use. Some stakeholders may want to see information that has been directly gathered from users and may be particularly interested in creative, innovative approaches. Others may look for a more 'objective' or traditional approach.

You might want to consider using a tool that has been previously validated in a clinical or academic context.

## Validated tools

Validated tools are ones that have been independently tested and shown to measure what they claim to measure. The findings generated by validated tools are generally perceived to carry greater weight as their ability to assess outcomes has been well established.

## Will they provide enough evidence?

Whether you have enough and good enough evidence relates in part to how appropriately you choose your indicators, and also in part to the perceived credibility of your data collection method. Getting information from different perspectives will also help you to build a stronger base of evidence. For example, a local youth group might use a combination of the following methods:

- feedback after sessions run with participants
- observation notes from youth workers
- school records on truancy and national statistics on truancy.

Similarly, a community centre that runs healthy living activities (from cookery lessons to keep fit classes) could use a combination of the following:

- feedback forms at the end of classes
- annual interviews with participants about fitness levels

- obesity and/or other health related statistics from the local GP.

Even with good data about the situation before and after the intervention, it is difficult to demonstrate that the outcomes are a result of your intervention. To overcome this, evaluations sometimes do a comparison study by setting up a control group.

## Support

- If you would like any support with evaluation and impact please contact Mariana Meirelles at [mariana@communitysouthwark.org](mailto:mariana@communitysouthwark.org) or for any other issues facing your organisation, please contact the Development Team at Community Southwark: [development@communitysouthwark.org.uk](mailto:development@communitysouthwark.org.uk) or 020 7358 7020.