

Knowing there are different kinds of data that can be collected, it is important to consider the data sources used for evaluation. The availability, reliability, and relevance of data can help determine which data sources to use for program evaluation.

Most program evaluations will collect both quantitative data (numbers) and qualitative data (text) in a mixed methods design to produce a more complete understanding of the program. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data can improve a program evaluation by ensuring that the limitations of one type of data are balanced by the strengths of another.

Overview of Methods to Collect Information

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Questionnaires, Surveys, Checklists	To quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be completed anonymously • inexpensive to administer • easy to compare and analyze • can be administered to many people • numerous sample questionnaires already exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • might not get thoughtful feedback • wording of question can bias client's responses • are impersonal • in surveys, may need sampling expert • doesn't get full story
Interviews	To fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get full range and depth of information • develops relationship with client • can be flexible with client 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can take time • can be hard to analyze and compare • can be costly • interviewer can bias client's responses
Documentation review	To gain an impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; involves review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get comprehensive and historical information • doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program • information already exists • few biases about information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often takes time • information may be incomplete • need to be quite clear about what types of information is desired • not a flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Challenges
Observation	To gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • view operations of a program as they are actually occurring • can adapt to events as they occur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors • can be complex to categorize observations • can influence behaviors of program participants • can be expensive
Focus groups	To explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quickly and reliably get common impressions • can be an efficient way to get a large range and depth of information in short time • can convey key information about programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be hard to analyze responses • need a good facilitator for safety and closure • difficult to schedule 6-8 people together
Case studies	To fully understand or depict a client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fully depicts client's experience in program input, process and results • powerful means to portray program to outsiders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe • represents depth of information, rather than breadth

Source: <https://managementhelp.org/evaluation/program-evaluation-guide.htm>