

Qualitative Data Toolkit: Qualitative Data Collection Methods- Strengths and Limitations

Method	When to use	Strengths	Limitations	Resources Needed
Key Informant Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather breast health information from within a specified geographic region from a limited number of well connected and informed community leaders and health professionals. • Understand the attitudes and beliefs of survivors and co-survivors on breast cancer issues. • Gather information from people with diverse backgrounds and opinions and be able to ask in-depth and probing questions. • Get respondents' to openly discuss a topic. • Obtain a better understanding of breast cancer statistics and how they translate in the community. • Gathering information when cultural barriers make surveys or focus groups difficult. • Examining specialized systems or processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore topics in-depth. • Yields detailed-rich data and new insights. • Allows informants to clarify issues as needed. • Provides an opportunity to strengthen and build relationship with communities. • Allows interviewer flexibility in administrating interview to particular individuals or circumstances. • Allows interviewer to explain or clarify questions. • Inexpensive and fairly simple to conduct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting the “right” informants may be difficult (from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints). • May be challenging to schedule interviews. • Difficult to generalize results to larger population. • Can be hard to analyze and compare. • Potential interview bias. • Requires well-qualified, highly trained interviewers. • Flexibility may result in inconsistencies. • Interviewee may distort information through recall error, selective perceptions, or desire to please interviewer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Travel time • Telephone cost • Skilled interviewer(s) • Scripts • Questionnaire • Recorder and/or note taker • Consent forms

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Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking for a range of ideas, beliefs, or feelings that people have about something. Uncover factors that influence opinions, behavior or motivation. Trying to understand differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people. Identify barriers and ways to overcome them. Information is needed to shed light on quantitative data already collected. High value placed on capturing the comments or language used by the target audience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be done inexpensively if done in-house. Can quickly get information about needs, community attitudes and norms. Efficient way to range and depth of information in a short time. Captures detailed-rich, in-depth data. Encourages and stimulates individuals to share more openly. Strengthens relationship with communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires a good facilitator. Can be expensive, especially if a facilitator needs to be hired. Responses can be hard to analyze. May be challenging to recruit participants in target communities. Need to schedule several sessions to capture diversity. Difficult to generalize to the larger population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Skilled facilitator (s) Script Incentives Food Recorder and/or note taker Consent forms
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather information from community providers and/or residents about service delivery gaps, needs and barriers. Support, expand, or better understand statistical or community data you already have. Gather information from community providers and/or residents on behaviors, beliefs or attitudes. Determine the level of knowledge that community providers and/or residents have on a particular issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People may feel more comfortable sharing in anonymous way. Can reach more people and have larger sample size. Can be done quickly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be expensive Response rates usually low. No opportunity to clarify questions. Hard to get representative sample size. Difficult to generalize responses. 	<p>Depending on the type of survey:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Knowledge of survey development Paper, stamps, envelopes Email or mailing addresses Telephone numbers Trained interviewers Data analysis skills

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Document Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insight into what people think and do. Information from different time periods. Background information. Validation of other data. Gather information about an issue that may not be observable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively inexpensive. Unobtrusive. May bring up issues not noted by others. In the language and words of participants. Ready for analysis without necessary transcription. Information is already available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to locate and obtain and might not be available for public viewing. Incomplete or inaccurate information. Difficult to decipher the information. May not match need in terms of locations, time period, or population. Information could be biased due to selective survival of information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Trained person that knows how to document needed information Note taking checklist Documents to review
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore interactions between individuals and how they communicate with each other. Calculate how much time is spent on various activities. Observe visual appearance of facilities. Visually describe situation that informants may be unable or unwilling to share. Experience events that have been described in interviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves the quality of data collected by other methods. Allows for detailed description of situations or events explained by informants. Opportunities for viewing unscheduled events. Record information as it occurs in a setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observer bias. Limited availability of sites and situations where access is allowed. Acceptance of observer in the community, setting (e.g. trust, discomfort, "outsider" label). Time consuming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time Trained observer Community or setting of interest Fieldnotes guide Consent form depending on setting

Sources:

- New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services: Addition Services for Prevention, Treatment, Recovery. Key Informant Interviews. Accessed on 5/2/2013: <http://www.oasas.ny.gov/prevention/needs/documents/KeyInformantInterviews.pdf>
- Kawulich, B.B. (2005). Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 6(2).
- Creswell, J.W. (2008). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*.