Qualitative Data Toolkit: Document Review Process

Introduction to Document Review

Document review is a process of identifying, analyzing and deriving useful information from existing documents. Documents consist of public and private records that the Community Profile Team can obtain about a community, population or site of interest. There are many different types of documents that can be utilized to further explore the problems highlighted by the quantitative data such as newspapers, minutes of meetings, medical charts, personal journals and letters, and photographs. As a data collection method, document review could be used when documents exist that are relevant to the questions, and if you can’t observe or interview the target population.

Document review can be used to provide:

- Insight into what people think and do
- Information from different time periods (historical data)
- Background information
- Validation of other data collected by other methods (e.g. interviews, observations)
- Gather information about an issue that may not be observable.

Strengths of using Document Review:

- Information already exists
- Doesn’t interrupt a program or process (unobtrusive)
- Provides behind-the-scenes look at program/process that may not be observable
- Inexpensive
- Often are reliable and valid
- Easy to analyze
- Can study trends
- May bring up other issues not noted by other means

Limitations of using Document Review:

- Information might be incomplete, inaccurate, disorganized, unavailable or out-of-date
- Could be biased due to selective survival of information
- Need to be clear in what the team is looking for
- May be representative of one person’s perspective
- May not be available on the population of interest
- Time consuming to collect, review and analyze many documents
- May not provide insight into participant’s personal thinking
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Planning and Conducting a Document Review

Prior to selecting document review as a data collection method, the Community Profile Team should have reviewed the data, determined the questions to be answered and defined the target population(s). The demographic and statistical data should have helped narrow the focus areas within the Affiliate’s service area. Both the quantitative and Health Systems Analysis informed the Community Profile Team on potential documents that could be reviewed.

Develop Data Collection Tools\(^2,3\): Create a data collection form to summarize the data gleaned from the document. The form may include the following information: type of document being reviewed, where the document is stored, a way to reference each document, and information that answers each assessment question. This form will be used to prepare the textual data for analysis. In addition, the Community Profile Team may want to develop document review protocols to ensure that the review process is systematically conducted the same each time. This is critical if there is more than one reviewer who is reviewing the documents. Being systematic in the review process assists in ensuring that valuable information is not missed. Sample document review forms are available in the Qualitative Data Toolkit on myKomen.org.

Collecting Data:

- **Access Existing Documents\(^2,3\):** Identify the questions that the Team wants to answer that may be contained in previously written reports, planning papers, research synopses, medical charts, or other documents. Both published and unpublished sources can be used in a document review.

- **Secure Access to the Documents\(^2\):** Certain documents may require the permission of others before being released for review and analysis. The Team will need to discuss the limitations they may face in getting certain documents, and may want to include others that may be able to assist the team in accessing the needed documents. **One limitation that the Team may encounter in trying to complete a document review of medical charts is the protection of personal medical information, also known as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act). Instead of doing a chart review, the Team may instead ask the health care provider for data related to institutional goals for breast health/cancer.**

- **Ensure Confidentiality\(^2\):** Confidentiality is always an important consideration when collecting data for the assessment. If the Team wants to review documents that involve confidential data about individuals, they need to develop a system that ensures confidentiality of individual-level data. Developing these processes and guidelines may also help the Team in securing access to sensitive or confidential documents. **If the Team has permission to secured access to personal health information (e.g., medical records), they must ensure that HIPAA guidelines are followed and that all identifying information (e.g., name, address, and phone) is omitted from the chart review form.**
• **Compile the Documents**\(^2\): Once the Team has secured access to the documents needed to answer the questions, compile the documents. It is important that the review is limited to only those documents that answer the assessment questions.

• **Understand How and Why Documents Were Produced**\(^2\): The Team may need to talk to the people who know something about the documents you are compiling to better understand the context in which they (documents) were developed. This is critical in gathering information for the analysis.

• **Determine the Accuracy of the Documents**\(^2\): Determining the accuracy of the documents may involve comparing the documents that contain similar information, checking the documents against other data that has been collected, and speaking with people who were involved in the development of the documents.

• **Summarize the information from the Documents**\(^2,3\): As each document is reviewed, the reviewer should complete the data collection form. The Community Profile Team should review the information collected and discuss where there is agreement or disagreement among the documents. They may also discuss what additional information is needed. The data collection forms should be collected and be prepared for analysis.

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**Guidelines for collecting documents and audiovisuals**\(^1\):

• Determine what material can provide information to answer the questions and how the material might complement existing forms of data from interviews and observations.

• Consider both public and private documents as sources.

• Once located, seek permission to use the materials from the appropriate individuals in charge of the materials.

• Once you have permission to use the documents, examine them for accuracy (e.g. information in one document matches that of other documents), completeness, and usefulness in answering the questions. This may require having to contact the author of the material.

• If you ask participants to keep a journal, provide specific instructions about the procedure.

• Record the information from the documents.
Analyzing and Drawing Conclusions About the Data:
Qualitative data analysis involves the coding, analysis and interpretation of themes/categories and descriptions in textual data and determines how they help answer the question(s) identified at the beginning of the process. This part of the qualitative data collection process is highly dependent upon the skills of the Community Profile Team’s qualitative resource. Please refer to Module 4 of the Community Profile Guidebook or Module 4 Toolkit: Data Analysis and Interpretation Section of the Qualitative Toolkit on myKomen.org for additional information on analysis and interpretation.

Sources: