

Data Collection Methods: Pros and Cons

Method	Description	Pros	Cons
Archival	Data that have already been collected by an agency or organization and are in their records or archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Relatively rapid • Unobtrusive • Can be highly accurate • Often good to moderate validity • Usually allows for historical comparisons or trend analysis • Often allows for comparisons with larger populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be difficult to access local data • Often out of date • When rules for recordkeeping are changed, makes trend analysis difficult or invalid • Need to learn how records were compiled to assess validity • May not be data on knowledge, attitudes, and opinions • May not provide a complete picture of the situation
Key Informant Interviews	Structured or unstructured one-on-one directed conversations with key individuals or leaders in a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost (assuming relatively few) • Respondents define what is important • Rapid data collection • Possible to explore issues in depth • Opportunity to clarify responses through probes • Sources of leads to other data sources and other key informants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be time consuming to set up interviews with busy informants • Requires skilled and/or trained interviewers • Accuracy (generalizability) limited and difficult to specify • Produces limited quantitative data • May be difficult to analyze and summarize findings

Method	Description	Pros	Cons
Focus Groups	Structured interviews with small groups of like individuals using standardized questions, follow-up questions, and exploration of other topics that arise to better understand participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Rapid data collection • Participants define what is important • Some opportunity to explore issues in depth • Opportunity to clarify responses through probes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be time consuming to assemble groups • Produces limited quantitative data • Requires trained facilitators • Less control over process than key informant interviews • Difficult to collect sensitive information • Accuracy (generalizability) limited and difficult to specify • May be difficult to analyze and summarize findings
Surveys	Standardized paper-and-pencil or phone questionnaires that ask predetermined questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be highly accurate • Can be highly reliable and valid • Allows for comparisons with other/larger populations when items come from existing instruments • Easily generates quantitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively high cost • Relatively slow design, implement, and analyze • Accuracy depends on who and how many people sampled • Accuracy limited to willing and reachable respondents • May have low response rates • Little opportunity to explore issues in depth