



Tips on Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection Methods

There are two broad categories of data collection methods: qualitative and quantitative. Initially much of the work of the CLIPs is likely to fall in the area of qualitative research. Later the work may involve more quantitative methods.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational. Use qualitative methods to capture what people say about their meanings and interpretations. Qualitative research typically involves qualitative data, i.e., data obtained through methods such as interviews, on-site observations, and focus groups that is in narrative rather than numerical form. Such data are analyzed by looking for themes and patterns. It involves reading, rereading, and exploring the data. How the data are gathered will greatly affect the ease of analysis and utility of findings.

Resources on Qualitative Research

Books

Many books are available on this topic. Three suggested books are:

1. Maxwell, J.(1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.
2. Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. (3rd edition).Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.
3. Wholey, J., Hatry, H., & Newcomer, K. (eds). (2004). *Handbook of practical program evaluation*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass.

Web Resources

There are numerous web sites that provide useful information and tools for conducting research. One is the website of the Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University that includes checklists of issues to consider when using different program evaluation models. For qualitative research, look in particular at the piece by Michael Quinn Patton on *Qualitative Evaluation*.

<http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/checklistmenu.htm>

Quantitative Research

Quantitative inquiries use numerical and statistical processes to answer specific questions. Statistics are used in a variety of ways to support inquiry or program assessment/evaluation. Descriptive statistics are numbers used to describe a group of items. Inferential statistics are computed from a sample drawn from a larger population with the intention of making generalizations from the sample about the whole population. The accuracy of inferences drawn from a sample is critically affected by the sampling procedures used.

It is important to start planning the statistical analyses at the same time that planning for an inquiry begins. Decisions about analysis techniques to use and statistics to report are affected by levels of measurement of the variables in the study, the questions being addressed, and the type and level of information that you expect to include in reporting on your discoveries.

Resources for Quantitative Research

Books

Numerous books are available on quantitative research. One suggestion is:

1. Wholey, J., Hatry, H., & Newcomer, K. (eds). (2004). *Handbook of practical program evaluation*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass.