Evaluation Methodology: Different Ways to Collect Data

FACTSHEET

Content developed from YouthREX's Evaluation Toolkit

When designing your evaluation methodology, you have some choices. The type of evaluation design and data collection methods that you select will depend on a few things:

1. **The program timeline:** When will the program begin? Is the program already up and running? Has the program finished?
2. **How many youths are involved in the program:** Are there less than 10 youths in the program? Or are there 50?
3. **The type of programming:** Is the program resource-based, like a drop-in clinic? Or does the program have a clear timeline with defined enrolment?

Let's keep these questions in mind as we discuss different ways that we can collect data to measure process and outcome evaluation questions.

1. Document Review

A review of existing documents and data of your program is a great way to get started tackling your process evaluation questions. Some examples of these types of data are:

- Intake forms, activity reports, progress reports
- Contact logs
- Meeting minutes
- Surveys/interviews with participants, clients, or staff

2. Quantitative/numeric data sources (best for larger samples)

When you want to measure your process and outcome indicators, quantitative data sources are ideal, especially when you have a large enough sample.

There are different ways to design a quantitative survey. Here are some common choices:

a) Pre-interim-post or pre-post

Using this approach provides a powerful design that will allow you to measure changes in youth over time on your various outcome indicators. This is done by asking youth the same questions before they start the program, during programming, and after they complete the program, and then comparing the results to see if they increased, decreased, or remained unchanged over time. You are also able to ask participants about their experiences in the program along the way, and offer recommendations to programmers based on youth feedback. This format only works if you are able to administer the pre-survey prior to programming, and if the sample is large enough.

For more information, watch **Designing Pre and Post Tests to Measure Program Outcomes** by **The Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF)**.

b) Post-only

This approach allows you to measure youth perceptions of program impact(s) by asking them to reflect on their program experiences and the degree to which their experiences impacted them once they have completed it. This design works well if programming has already begun and you are not able to use a pre-post design.

(c) Retrospective post-then-pre

In the traditional pre-post design, youth answer the same questions before they start the program, and then after they complete the program. In the retrospective post-then-pre design, youth who have completed a program are asked to rate their current knowledge, skill, attitude, etc., and then to reflect back and rate that same knowledge, skill, attitude, etc. before participating in the program. This produces two scores: a retrospective pre, and a post. Thus, you can compare the two sets of results to see if they increased, decreased, or remained unchanged over time.

For more information, read **Using the Retrospective Post-then-Pre Design** and **Designing a Retrospective Post-then-Pre Question** from **The University of Wisconsin Extension**.

3. Qualitative data sources (ideal for smaller samples)

Qualitative data is non-numerical and is especially useful for gathering rich, in-depth, descriptive data from a small sample. Some examples of qualitative data sources include:

- **Focus groups:** Typically, focus groups last 1-2 hours, are composed of 5-7 participants, and are held in a neutral and comfortable environment.
- **In-depth Interviews:** In-depth interviews are conducted with a single participant, typically last 30-45 minutes, and are held in a private and comfortable environment.
- **Observations and Field Notes:** Observations can be another rich source of program data that can provide meaningful information that is especially relevant to your process evaluation.
- **Arts-based methods:** (e.g., PhotoVoice, chalk it out, post-it note board) Art, drama, and video are intriguing alternatives to traditional methods of data collection and can be used to demystify program evaluation for youth participants. Arts-based approaches allow youth to articulate their program experiences in a different way, which may be especially fitting for youths who are less comfortable with traditional methods (e.g., surveys and interviews).

For detailed information and tips on qualitative data sources, view our factsheet **here**.

4. Mixed Methods

Mixed-methods involve a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. For example, you could administer a quantitative survey before conducting a focus group, or add qualitative short answer questions to your quantitative survey.

For a discussion of mixed methods research design from **Research Rundowns**, click **here**.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Data Collection Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Interviews	Captures rich, nuanced data	Time consuming to collect and analyze
Focus Groups	Captures rich, nuanced data	Requires expertise and objectivity to moderate; time consuming to analyze
Surveys	Easy to administer and analyze	Captures mostly quantitative data only
Observations	Non-intrusive to participants	Observer bias - subjective
	Validated if using existing tools	May be difficult for participants to understand; may be difficult to find a validated tool that meets your purpose
Testimonials/ Stories	Fun, easy to collect, rich data	Subjective, self-report