

TIP SHEET

Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Collection Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Written Questionnaire (via mail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large outreach • No interviewer bias • Convenient • Low Cost • Minimum staff time required • Easy to administer • Quick • Standardized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible low response rate • Possible unrepresentation • No clarification of questions • Need homogeneous group if response is low • No assurance addressee was respondent
Telephone Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate cost • Relatively easy to administer • Permits unlimited callbacks • Can cover wide geographic area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible problem of representation • Possible interviewer bias • Requires trained interviewers
Face-to-Face Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High response rate • Flexibility • Gain in-depth data • Develop rapport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Requires trained interviewers • Possible interviewer bias • Limits sample size • Time consuming
Email Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Easy and convenient • Almost instantaneous • Can cover wide geographic area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have email access • Self-selection • Lacks anonymity • Risk of being "purged" • Lack of "cueing" • Must be short • Noninvasive items only
Group Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Response rate • Efficient and economical • Can stimulate productivity of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May intimidate and suppress individual differences • Fosters conformity • Group pressure may influence responses
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate behavioral data • Can be unobtrusive • Moderate cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires trained observers • May bias behavior • Possible observer bias • May be time consuming
Existing Records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Easy to randomize • Avoid data collection • Minimum staff needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need agency cooperation • Certain data may be unavailable • Often incomplete • Confidential restrictions
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for formative evaluation • Low cost • Flexible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible result bias • Limited input from participants