

QUALITATIVE DATA 101: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

This handout is meant to supplement the TCEC webinar "[Qualitative Data 101: A Beginner's Guide](#)." If you have questions about qualitative data, contact TCEC at any time at tobaccoeval@ucdavis.edu.

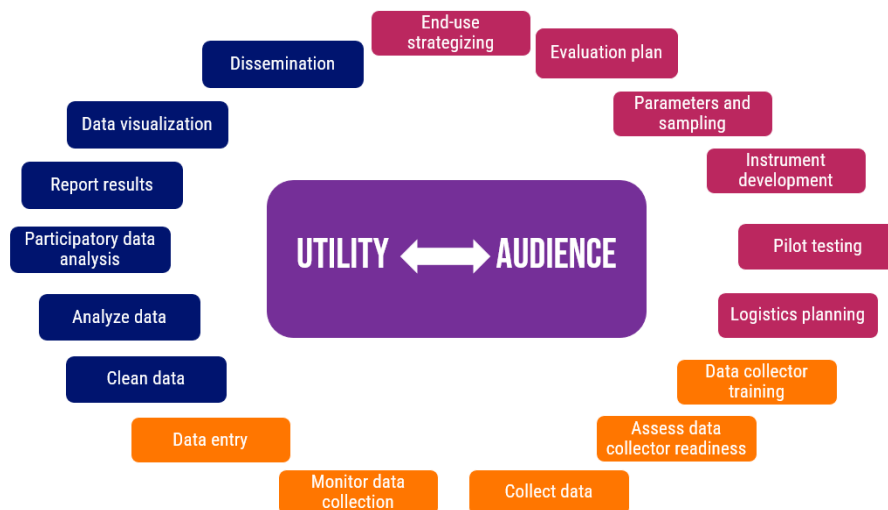
What are we talking about today?

What is Qualitative Data?

- When to use it
- How to collect it
- How to analyze it

The Life Cycle of an Evaluation Activity

We'll be referring back to what TCEC likes to call the [Life Cycle of an Evaluation Activity](#), which begins with the **Planning** stage, then the **Data Collection** stage, and finally, the **Analysis & Reporting** stage. For each step in this cycle, we have to consider its **UTILITY** and its **AUDIENCE**—that is, what it's being used for, and who it may be impacting.



What is Qualitative Data?

Qualitative data is **narrative data** that represents a value, idea, or concept.

This makes it different from **quantitative data**, which is **numerical data**—data that is quantifiable and can be easily counted.

To put it simply, quantitative data can tell you HOW MANY dogs a person has...

...While qualitative methods can give you a better understanding of how owning a dog impacts someone's life.

Qualitative data captures information like:

- Life experiences
- Perceptions
- Opinions

When to collect Qualitative Data?

- When your goal is to: Add detail, depth, and meaning to quantitative data
- Understand the **meaning** people attach to experiences or events related to an objective
- Examine how or why an outcome, such as the adoption of a smoke-free policy, was produced
- Find out if there were any unexpected positive or negative influences that may have had an impact on the effectiveness of the intervention.

Because qualitative data is often about getting purposeful insight from a specific group, you're often going to be working with a **smaller sample size** than when you're collecting quantitative data.

So your **data sources** are very important!

That's why you should always begin with the end in mind. [End-Use Strategizing](#) helps you determine what kind of data collection to do.

Data Collection Methods

- **Key Informant Interviews (KII)** allow you to gather rich qualitative data from a purposively selected group of informants who have unique insights.
 - This information can be used to determine how to effectively persuade decision-makers, monitor stakeholder buy-in, and help develop future strategies.
- **Focus Groups** are a qualitative data collection method designed to draw out participants' beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and feelings on a topic through an organized or structured discussion
 - Focus Groups are useful to understand the RANGE of choices or behaviors that are prevalent, WHY people feel a certain way, HOW things work, the NORMS of a particular population/ community, or REACTIONS to strategies/campaign messaging or materials.
- A **Media Activity Record** is a data collection method that monitors the news to look at the number, type, content, sentiment, and response to media coverage on tobacco control-related topics over a specified period of time.
 - Media Activity Records are used to assess how tobacco control issues are being framed, the accuracy and neutrality of facts presented, and the level of public support or opposition reflected in the sentiment of media pieces. It also measures the reach of particular messaging generated by projects/coalitions to educate the public with media releases or letters to the editor.
 - This information can be used to inform the timing and direction of intervention activities and help guide local efforts to support educational campaigns and policy advocacy.
- A **Policy Record Review** is a qualitative data collection method that uses information from secondhand or thirdhand sources, e.g., documents or web content, to investigate and/or track decision maker stance surrounding tobacco control topics.
 - Policy Record Reviews typically includes four components: 1) **pre-intervention research**, 2) **meeting observation**, 3) **documenting the policy adoption process**, and 4) **comparing an adopted policy to a model policy**.

Analyzing Qualitative Data

- When we're dealing with numerical data, we usually turn to statistical methods for analysis. But with qualitative methods, our data looks like transcripts, notes, or summaries, so we need some different tools to find the story in our data.
- **Content Analysis:** Studying the data to find themes or patterns, which you can then categorize.
- **Coding:** You start with your data, for example, notes from a focus group. As you read each segment of text, you want to underline or highlight things that jump out at you as important.
 - Also think about how you would characterize or categorize the sentence or paragraph and jot the code in the margin. This will help organize the data into categories.
 - You can code your data by hand, in a word processor like Microsoft Word, or in specialized analysis software like NVIVO.
 - The categories you organize your data into will depend greatly on your END-USE STRATEGIZING— what's the big picture?

Visualizing Qualitative Data

- Data visualization is a great place to combine your qualitative data with quantitative data in order to add more of that depth and meaning to the story you're trying to tell with your data.