

TIPS & TOOLS #5: QUALITATIVE METHODS

Q: How do qualitative methods differ from quantitative methods?

A: While quantitative evaluation methods yield numerical data that are typically analyzed using statistical methods, qualitative evaluation methods yield narrative data – often describing experiences, perceptions, or opinions - that are less easily summarized in numerical form. Content analysis is the most common way of analyzing qualitative data.

Q: Are there certain evaluation purposes, questions, and situations that are especially well-suited to qualitative methods?

- A:** It makes sense to use qualitative methods in your tobacco control evaluation design when your goal is to:
- Add detail, depth, and meaning to quantitative data. For example, quantitative data on public opinions about a smoke-free beaches policy can be strengthened with illustrative quotes showing the reasons why people agree or disagree with the policy.
 - Understand the meaning people attach to experiences or events related to an objective. For example, focus groups can be conducted in multi-unit housing complexes to understand residents' attitudes and/or knowledge about second-hand smoke. This information can be used to plan effective intervention activities.
 - Examine how or why an outcome, such as the adoption of a smoke-free policy, was produced. For example, interviewing key opinion leaders can identify which intervention activities were effective and which were not. Program staff and evaluators can use this information to decide how to adapt various components of the plan for future efforts.
 - Find out if there were any unexpected positive or negative community influences that may have had an impact on the effectiveness of the intervention. For example, interviews with City Council members could reveal that a newspaper exposé of underage smoking, written without any involvement of the local tobacco control project, was a major influence in Council members' support for a retail tobacco licensing ordinance.

Q: Are qualitative evaluation methods only useful in collecting and analyzing process data? Or do they also have a role in outcome evaluation?

A: Qualitative evaluation methods are not limited to process evaluation, just as quantitative methods are not limited to outcome evaluation. For example, **qualitative** observations that collect more than simple tallies of events can be used to gather data about what happened during a tobacco control intervention (yielding process data), as well as to describe how successful the intervention was in achieving the objective (yielding outcome data). Similarly, a **quantitative** data collection method, like a face-to-face public intercept survey, may be used to gather process data that will help with planning a tobacco control intervention or to collect outcome data that can be used as evidence for assessing the achievement of an objective.

Q: What else should our project consider if we are developing a plan that includes qualitative evaluation methods?

A: Like quantitative methods, qualitative data collection methods require considerable resources. For example, if you want to do key informant interviews with community leaders, it is important to make sure that adequate budget and staff time are available to develop the interview protocol, conduct the interviews, and prepare the data for content analysis. The process of collecting and analyzing qualitative data can take place over a long period of time, so it is important to make sure that any deliverables in the scope of work that depend on the qualitative information can be completed on time. In addition, the validity and reliability of qualitative data are heavily dependent on the skill, sensitivity, and training of those collecting the data, so particular attention should be given to ensuring that data collectors are well-prepared for the task.

Qualitative Methods Resources:

- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (6th Edition). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2003). *Qualitative evaluation checklist*. Document available at: <http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/qec.pdf> (Evaluation Center of Western Michigan).
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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