Utilizing End-Use Strategizing to Create Data Collection Instruments

Say your project is planning to conduct a public opinion survey about smoking in outdoor dining areas, some key informant interviews with apartment managers, or an observation of tobacco litter in local parks. You'll need to adapt an existing data collection instrument or design your own. But either way, how can you be sure your evaluation activity will collect the information that will help move your policy work forward?

Applying end-use strategizing can help. Instead of beginning with forming the questions you want to ask, start by thinking about the purpose and use of the data you hope to collect. What is it you are trying to achieve with the data? Who are you trying to convince or inform and what actions should result as a consequence? The more specifically you can outline this, the easier the rest of the process becomes.

How will the data be used?

Once you've identified the target audience for the data, then think about what type and quantity of data will be convincing to this audience. The sample size and rigor needed to persuade council members is likely to be very different from what is needed to convince apartment managers.

Next, figure out what sources of the information will be most credible to your target audience. Think too about who should be excluded from the sample. For example, the opinion of park users who live (and vote) outside of the county may hold less weight than local residents (voters) with city council members. Also, what quantity (numbers as well as percentages) of respondents would convince them there is public momentum for a policy?

Now you are ready to consider the types of questions you might ask. Pinpoint what pieces of information your audience will care about. From here, you can begin to word questions that will best collect this specific data. Keep in mind any cultural factors that might affect the construction or sequence of your questions such as the language spoken, literacy level, and cultural understanding of your potential data sources (interviewees). This might affect the examples you use in the instrument, the way questions are asked or whether to use a face-to-face or pen-to-paper format.

What pieces of information will your audience care about?

Consider the type and level of analysis you want to be able to conduct on the data. How might you need to be able to separate out and analyze data? Is it important to be able to distinguish characteristics of these sources (by gender, age, zip code, income, education, ethnicity, whether or not they use tobacco, etc.)? If so, then you'll need to ask relevant demographic questions.

All of these factors will affect how you construct your data collection instrument. Applying reverse logic to the development process will help ensure that after you've put in all the hard work to collect the data, it will really speak to the purpose you intended, and hopefully convince your target audience to move in the direction your project is promoting.

For more ideas on how to apply end-use strategizing, check out several tools, examples and even an archived teleconference on the subject on the TCEC website.