Collect and/ or retrieve data

This task focuses on ways to collect and/or retrieve data about activities, results, context and other factors.

It is important to consider the type of information you want to gather from your participants and the ways you will analyse that information, before you choose your method. You should also consider triangulating your methods in order to ensure multiple data sources and perspectives.

Methods

The data collection tasks have been organised into five clusters based on the source of the data.

1. Information from individuals
2. Information from groups
3. Observation
4. Physical measurements
5. Reviewing existing records and data

Before choosing methods and collecting data it is essential to consider your key evaluation questions (KEQs) and the type of information you require to address these questions. You also need to consider the context of the evaluation and ensure the methods you choose are suitable and fit for purpose.

1. Information from individuals

- Deliberative opinion polls

  The purpose of Deliberative Opinion Polls (DOPs) is to measure informed opinion on a particular issue.

- Logs and diaries

  Logs, journals and diaries are monitoring tools for recording data over a long period of time.

- Goal Attainment Scales

  Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) is a method that can be used as a means of measuring outcome data from different contexts set out on a 5 point scale of -2 to +2.

- Hierarchical card sorting

  Hierarchical card sorting (HCS) is a participatory card sorting method designed to provide insight into how people categorise and rank different phenomena.

- Interviews

Interviews are conversations between an investigator (interviewer) and a respondent ('interviewees', 'informants' or 'sources') in which questions are asked in order to obtain information.

- Convergent interviewing

A convergent interview is a type of interview intended to explore issues widely through a combination of unstructured interviews and a maximum diversity sample.

- In-depth interviews

An in-depth interview is a type of interview with an individual that aims to collect detailed information beyond initial and surface-level answers.

- Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews involve interviewing people who have particularly informed perspectives on an aspect of the program being evaluated.

- Keypad technology

Keypads are used in group meetings to gauge audience response to presentations and provide valuable feedback in large group settings.

- Mobile data collection

Mobile Data Collection (MDC) is the use of mobile phones, tablets or personal digital assistants (PDAs) for programming or data collection.

- Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory photography method that seeks to empower marginalised people to share their experiences through digital storytelling.

- Photolanguage

Photolanguage is a projective technique to elicit rich verbal data where participants choose an existing photograph as a metaphor and then discuss it.

- Polling booth

Polling booth is a data collection methodology used to obtain sensitive information from participants.

- Postcards

Postcards can be used to collect information quickly, and they can also be used to provide a short report on evaluation findings (or an update on progress).

- Projective techniques

Projective techniques, originally developed for use in psychology, can be used in an evaluation to provide a prompt for interviews.

- Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a specific set of written questions which aims to extract specific information from the chosen respondents.

- Email questionnaires

  Email Questionnaires are surveys or questionnaires that are distributed online via email.

- Face-to-face questionnaires

  Face-to-face questionnaires are conducted by an interviewer asking questions of a respondent in person.

- Internet questionnaire

  An internet questionnaire allows the collection of data through an electronic set of questions that are posted on the web.

- Mobile questionnaires

  Questionnaires and surveys can be conducted through mobile phones which are able to connect to the internet.

- Mail questionnaire

  Questionnaires can be mailed out to a sample of the population, enabling the researcher to connect with a wide range of people.

- Telephone questionnaires

  Respondents can be surveyed using questionnaires delivered by telephone.

- Seasonal calendars

  Seasonal calendars are useful for evaluation as they can help analyse time-related cyclical changes in data.

- Sketch mapping

  Sketch mapping is useful for creating a visual representation ('map') of a geographically based or defined issue drawn from the interpretation of a group or different groups of stakeholders.

- Stories of change

  Stories of change show what is valued through the use of specific narratives of events.

  Structured with a beginning, middle and end, they focus on the change that has taken place due to the program.

- Personal stories

  Personal stories provide qualitative data about how people experience their lives and can be used to make sense of the past and to understand possible futures.

2. Information from groups

- After action review

  The after action review (AAR) is a simple method for facilitating an assessment of organisational performance by bringing together a team to discuss a task, event, activity or project in an open and honest fashion.

- Brainstorming

  Brainstorming involves focussing on a problem and then encouraging participants to come up with as many solutions as possible.

- Card visualization

  Card visualization is a participatory method for capturing data that uses paper cards to allow groups to brainstorm and share their ideas.

- Concept mapping

  A concept map shows how different ideas relate to each other - sometimes this is called a mind map or a cluster map.

- Delphi study

  The Delphi technique is a quantitative option to generate group consensus through an iterative process of answering questions.

- Dotmocracy

  Dotmocracy is an established facilitation method for collecting and recognizing levels of agreement on written statements among a large number of people.

- Fishbowl technique

  The fish bowl activity is used to manage group discussion.

- Future search conference

  A future search conference is a meeting that spans more than one day with the objective that participants identify a shared vision of the future towards which to aim.

- Interviews

  Interviews are conversations between an investigator (interviewer) and a respondent ('interviewees', 'informants' or 'sources') in which questions are asked in order to obtain information.

- Focus groups

  A focus group is a type of group interview designed to explore peoples attitudes.

- Mural

A mural, a large drawing on the wall, can be used to collect data from a group of people about the current situation, their experiences using a service, or their perspectives on the outcomes from a project.

- ORID

  ORID is a specific facilitation framework that enables a focused conversation with a group of people in order to reach some point of agreement or clarify differences.

- Q-methodology

  Q-methodology (also known as Q-sort) is the systematic study of participant viewpoints.

- Social mapping

  Social mapping, or 'wellbeing ranking', is used to identify households using pre-determined indicators based on socio-economic factors.

- SWOT analysis

  The SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool that encourages group or individual reflection on and assessment of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of a particular strategy and how to best implement it.

- World cafe

  The world café is a methodology for hosting group dialogue which emphasizes the power of simple conversation in considering relevant questions and themes.

- Writeshop

  A Writeshop is a writing workshop involving a concentrated process of drafting, presenting, reviewing and revising documentation of practice.

3. Observation

Gathering information by observing people, places and/ or processes either directly or through still or moving images (photography or video). This cluster of methods involves watching and documenting the incidence of objects and/ or the behaviour of people.

These methods do not involve gathering data directly from individuals or groups, but rather about observing individuals, groups and things. Evaluators of an education project may observe the physical attributes of a school, the accessibility of the site, the availability of latrines, library, and playground. The evaluator may observe the numbers of boys and girls in a classroom, the teaching techniques used and the types of resources that children use.

- Field trips

  Field trips are organised trips where participants visit physical sites.

- Non-participant observation

Non-participant Observation involves observing participants without actively participating.

- Participant observation

  Participant observation is used to identify the attitudes and operation of a community by a researcher living within its environs.

- Photography/Video recording for data collection

  This option uses a series of still photographs or videos taken over a period of time to discern changes taking place in the environment or activities of a community.

- Transect

  Transect walks are a method for gathering spatial data on an area by observing people, surroundings and resources while walking around an area or community.

4. Physical measurements

Measuring physical changes based on agreed indicators and measurement procedures. Examples include birth weight, nutrition levels, rain levels, and soil fertility.

- Biophysical measurement

  Biophysical measurement measures physical changes that take place over a period of time related to a specific indicator and using an accepted measurement procedure.

- Geographical

  Capturing geographic information about persons or objects of interest such as the locations of high prevalence of a disease or the location of service delivery points.

5. Existing documents and data

Often information required for an evaluation has already been collected for other purposes. Ministries, government agencies, NGOs, and other organizations often produce valuable reports that you can use to supplement your own data collection. The document review process provides a systematic procedure for identifying, analyzing, and deriving useful information from existing documents such as project documents, information on related projects, government records and publicly available statistics. Document review can assist in triangulating findings collected through other evaluation methods, for example interview and observations. Document review can also reduce duplication.

An evaluator may review existing documents for the following reasons: to gather background information, to determine if implementation of the program reflects the program plan, when you need information to help you develop other data collection tools for evaluation and when you need data to answer what and how many evaluation questions commonly collected by other agencies.

- Big data

Big data refers to data that are so large and complex that traditional methods of collection and analysis are not possible.

- Logs and diaries

  Logs, journals and diaries are monitoring tools for recording data over a long period of time.

- Official statistics

  Statistics published by government agencies or other public bodies such as international organizations are often useful in evaluations.

- Previous evaluations and research

  Using the findings from evaluation and research studies conducted on the same or closely related areas is an important first step for evaluation planning.

- Existing documents

  Reviewing documents produced as part of the implementation of the evaluand can provide useful background information and be beneficial in understanding the alignment between planned and actual implementation.

- Reputational monitoring dashboard

  A 'reputation monitoring dashboard' allows users to monitor and quickly appraise reputational trends at a glance and from a variety of different sources.