

Collecting High-Quality Data in Interviews and Focus Groups

Organizations can use interviews and focus groups to hear about the experiences, ideas, and opinions of program staff and youth. Unlike surveys, interviews and focus groups allow for open-ended responses to questions and enable interviewers or moderators to probe for more detail or clarification, as needed. When conducting interviews and focus groups, organizations will want to ensure the data accurately reflect staff and youths' perspectives. The accompanying video introduced a few key steps to follow to collect high-quality data with interviews and focus groups, which the list below summarizes. See Table 1 for key terms and their definitions.



Determine whether to use interviews or focus groups. The choice of an interview or focus group depends on the goal of the data collection, the number and type of respondents, and the time available for data collection. Interviews allow you to collect in-depth information but can be time consuming to conduct many. Focus groups allow you to collect a variety of perspectives at once, but people might not feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics in front of others.



Establish a rapport with respondents. Be aware of power dynamics between the respondents and interviewer, and make respondents feel comfortable by demonstrating interest and respect. Ideally interviewers should be administrators or staff who are not directly involved with providing the programming. Set ground rules for focus groups or small-group interviews, such as speaking one at a time.



Ensure privacy and anonymity. Make sure respondents are in a space where no one will overhear them. Let respondents know their responses will not be attributed to them individually when the data are analyzed and the findings shared.



Ask open-ended questions that encourage detailed responses and follow up with probes to get additional details. Avoid yes or no questions. Frame questions in a neutral way that does not suggest you are looking for a particular answer. Avoid overidentification with respondents by suggesting through words or body language that they are giving the correct response.

Table 1. Key terms

Term	Definition
Focus group	A facilitator poses questions for discussion to a group of respondents; interaction among respondents is encouraged
Interview	An interviewer asks questions to a respondent about a topic, either individually or in a small group
Leading questions	Questions that encourage a particular answer (e.g., The in-class readings are informative, right?)
Probing questions	Questions that get respondents to elaborate on their answers (e.g., Can you tell me more about that?)
Overidentification	Identifying with a respondent to a great extent, such as by repeatedly agreeing with them

For more on interviews:

This tip sheet provides guidance on when and how to conduct an interview as well as how to analyze and use interview data: <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/interviewing-tip-sheet-april-2020.pdf>

This web page provides tips for conducting interviews: <https://globalhealth.duke.edu/news/five-tips-conducting-effective-qualitative-interviews>

This document provides strategies for conducting interviews: https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/interview_strategies.pdf

This video provides information on conducting interviews: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PhcgIOGFg8>

For more on focus groups:

This tip sheet provides guidance on when and how to conduct a focus group as well as how to analyze and use focus group data: <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-08/focus-group-tip-sheet-april-2020.pdf>

This web page provides information about conducting virtual focus groups: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/conducting-successful-virtual-focus-groups>

This document provides information on conducting focus groups with youth: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/eu-kids-online/toolkit/frequently-asked-questions/FAQ-34.pdf>

This video provides guidance on conducting focus groups: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCAPz14yjd4>

About this series

This video series, and the accompanying tip sheets on understanding and collecting high-quality data, were created as part of the [Sexual Risk Avoidance Education National Evaluation \(SRAENE\)](#). The series covers a range of data-related topics to help grantees understand the importance of high-quality data and provide guidance on how they can collect them in their program. Although some of the resources are drawn from topic areas that are not related to SRAE, the content on data is still relevant.

FYSB does not recommend any particular survey platform or data system that may be referenced in tip sheets.

For more information or questions, contact the SRAENE team at SRAETA@mathematica-mpr.com.

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