Data Collection Formats: Pros and Cons

A needs assessment may take many different formats. The most common formats include surveys, interviews, focus groups, or key informant interviews. A needs assessment might utilize one or more data collection formats. The following table shows the pros and cons for these data collection formats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Format</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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| Survey or Questionnaire      | • Easy to administer  
                               • Inexpensive  
                               • Less time-consuming  
                               • Reaches large numbers of respondents | • Doesn’t allow for clarification of questions  
                               • Can be hard to analyze because of combination of open- and closed-ended questions  
                               • Provides limited answer choices |
| Interview                    | • Allows personal interaction  
                               • Obtains in-depth information  
                               • Can be conducted in person or on the phone | • Small number of respondents  
                               • Time-consuming  
                               • Can be difficult to analyze |
| Focus Group                  | • Allows personal interaction  
                               • Obtains in-depth information  
                               • Generates a group dynamic where interaction can yield richer conversations  
                               • Provides ability to observe nonverbal cues | • Can be expensive  
                               • Less able to generalize  
                               • Time-consuming  
                               • Needs experienced moderator  
                               • Generates a group dynamic where participants may be less likely to speak in front of others |
| Key Informant Interview      | • Obtains key insights/knowledge from informants  
                               • Better ensures that minority or less visible audiences are included  
                               • Can help establish rapport | • May overlook other perspectives  
                               • Requires interviewer to know who would make good informants  
                               • Not representative  
                               • Gives more room for biased data |