The IllumiLab
Insights into Impact

Data Collection Methods

There are several different ways to collect data, and you should select methods according to the type of data you want to collect, from whom you want to collect it, how you plan to use it, and what resources and capacities you have for data collection.

METHOD	PURPOSE	OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
Surveys & Questionnaires	To quickly and easily gather lots of information from lots of people in a non-threatening way.	• Can be anonymous • Inexpensive to administer • Gather lots of responses • Gather lots of data • Easy to aggregate & analyze • Many surveys, assessments & questionnaires already exist, which can be adopted or adapted	• Survey design requires careful thought and skill • Data can be superficial and lack context • Response rates can be low • Participants are not always accurate self-reporters
Interviews	To gather rich, in-depth information about respondents' experiences and perspectives.	• Provides in-depth information • Allows for flexibility and evolution in the line of inquiry	• Time-intensive and therefore costly • Data more difficult to aggregate and analyze • Interviewer can bias responses
Observation	To gather information about observable changes in participant behavior.	• If structured, can be more objective than self-report surveys • Does not require participant responses, therefore can be mandated to ensure complete data • Can be seamlessly integrated into other operations	• Time-intensive • Requires careful planning and observer training • Data more difficult to aggregate and analyze
Documentation Review	To evaluate program operations or outcomes without interrupting services or burdening participants.	• Can gather historical information • Doesn't interrupt programming or burden participants	• Time-intensive • Data is restricted to what already exists • Lack of uniformity and completeness can interfere with aggregation and analysis