




## COLLECT MEANINGFUL DATA: Being Responsive to Community Norms

**Purpose:** You may find that data collection approaches you have used successfully in one community are not working as well in another. This emPower Tool answers some questions we are often asked and provides tips on community and cultural norms so you can build trusting relationships with the communities you serve. Note: these tips should not be used to stereotype, but to think about how best to collect *meaningful data* with your communities. *See also: Collect Meaningful Data: Decolonizing Your Data Practices and Centering Anti-Racism in Your Data Practices emPower Tools.*

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### Data Challenges: How to Be Responsive to Community

Challenge	Possible Strategies
 <p>It's hard to get people to participate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consult with community leaders</b> (in-person is best!) about your study aims, design, and methods.</li> <li>• <b>Ask why people might be hesitant to participate.</b> Address any concerns that arise by resolving the issues, and/or asking a local collaborator to help provide reassurances. Perhaps provide a way for a participant to give consent anonymously if they are concerned what other people will think if they participate.</li> <li>• <b>If a community is more group-oriented,</b> a group meeting may draw more people than individual interviews.</li> <li>• <b>Word of mouth</b> can be very effective in gaining support. Build positive relationships with each participant, so they can tell others about their good experience, and help build community support.</li> <li>• Time research activities to <b>avoid important holidays and events,</b> so it is easier for people to come.</li> </ul>
 <p>Language barriers, literacy and comprehension</p>	<p>Your participants may be having comprehension problems if you see the following <b>cues</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants ask a lot of questions to understand the questions.</li> <li>• There are long pauses or silence with no response.</li> <li>• Their responses don't answer the question.</li> </ul> <p><b>Some problem-solving approaches:</b></p> <p><i>In-person surveys</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Read</b> the question and response options clearly and carefully, out loud. Repeat them a second time.</li> <li>• <b>Paraphrase</b> the question and/or response categories.</li> <li>• Ask if the participant(s) have <b>questions.</b></li> <li>• Ask the participant(s) to <b>think about their response.</b></li> <li>• When a participant answers the question verbally, <b>repeat their answer back</b> to them and <b>ask if you understood</b> their answer correctly.</li> </ul> <p><i>Online or written surveys</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consider using color labels instead of numbers</b> in your measurement tool. For instance, use a gradient of colors (pale green for 0 versus highlighter green for 5).</li> <li>• <b>If you need translation,</b> ask several translators to take turns reviewing and editing the questions, to ensure translation quality is high.</li> </ul>
 <p>Participants arrive late</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Different cultures use time differently.</b> Some communities may put higher value on the people they are with at the moment or the task they have to do, than on meeting a tight schedule.</li> <li>• <b>Adjust accordingly.</b> Schedule extra time for people to gather for events. Add extra time at the end, after the agenda is over, to allow for extra questions and conversations, and to build relationships.</li> </ul>

## General Tips for Understanding Your Clients and their Stories

### Stay Curious and Open

**Make an effort to continually learn** about the culture(s) of the people with whom you are working. Even if you are familiar with a culture, there is always more to learn and understand.

**Do not be afraid to ask questions!** Many times, recognizing your own humility is a moment to build rapport with a community.

### Giving and Receiving Gifts

In many cultures, gifts are key to showing respect and building relationships. Different cultures have very different expectations and etiquette around gifts.

**Ask questions** to learn what is expected, appropriate and polite. Gifts may be tied to **social obligations, meals can be gifts**, etc.

- For example, it may be important to **give gifts** to people who participate, assist or support you in your research.
- It's also important to know how to **receive gifts politely** in a culture.

### Give Back to Community

The data you collect from your clients should ultimately be owned by them, and the broader communities you serve.

For example, **share research findings** with participants and key persons who were important in facilitating entry into the group!

## Cultural Norms → Data Norms



### More Collectivist Cultures

*Such as much of Latin America, Asia and Africa*

#### Cultural Norms:

- Families and communities have a central role
- Social rules promote selflessness
- Emphasis on common goals vs. individual pursuits

#### Data Impacts:

**Acquiescent Response Style (ARS)** is a tendency to choose “agree” or “yes” responses to survey questions more frequently than other options

- As **immigrants** acculturate into a new culture, their response style may more closely reflect the predominant cultural norms of the host country
- **Bilingual respondents** tend to answer based off of the culture associated with the language of the survey
- **Face-to-face respondents** may be more likely to have an acquiescent response style than on a paper or web survey

#### Possible Strategies:

**A topic-specific rating scale can reduce the incidence of ARS** compared to the agree-disagree Likert scale

- **Instead of:** Strongly agree → Strongly disagree
- **Try:** I strongly agree that data *are fun* → I strongly disagree that data *are fun*

**In-person surveys or interviews** may cause respondents to portray themselves as more polite (ARS)

**Try web-based surveys or interviews** instead of in-person



### More Individualistic Cultures

*Such as the US, Canada, Australia & parts of Europe*

#### Cultural Norms:

- Pride in self-sufficiency
- Independence and autonomy are valued
- Communication tends to be direct and personal

#### Data Impacts:

**Extreme Response Style (ERS)** is a tendency to choose the two endpoints of a response scale more frequently than other categories.

- Respondents with **less education** tend to respond with extreme responses
- **Acculturation levels** (how an individual adapts their home culture with another culture) of a population affect extreme responses between participants
- **Masculine cultures** (those that have expectations for men to be more assertive and women more nurturing) are more prone to ERS

#### Possible Strategies:

**Try a 3 or 10-point scale instead of a scale with 5 options**

- **Instead of:** Strongly agree → agree → neutral → disagree → strongly disagree
- **Try:**
  - Strongly agree → neutral → strongly disagree, **OR**
  - Strongly agree → agree → somewhat agree → agree sometimes → neutral → disagree sometimes → somewhat disagree → disagree → strongly disagree