emPOWER TOOLS
THE CAPACITY COLLECTIVE

COLLECT MEANINGFUL DATA:
Beyond Numbers–Collecting Qualitative Data

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Purpose: Data are not just numbers (quantitative). They are also stories, articles, texts and images (qualitative). You and your staff work hard to write thorough comments and case notes; those are data that can help you stay connected to your communities and make decisions for your program. Here are some favorite tips and tricks for getting the most out of your qualitative data, including several research methods that use different ways to tell the story (audio, video, photo). *Also check out the* ***Analyzing Qualitative Data – Tips and Tools*** *emPower Tool.*

Case Notes/Comments

Case notes and/or comment boxes often contain a lot of important data that is never fully used, because it is hard to work through all the info.

Make the most out of notes using ***Coding Schemes*****.**

- **Use keywords** to signal notes on a topic of interest
  - Examples: **enter "Stressor**" then enter notes about a family's current stressors **or** enter "**Success**" and write a note on a microsuccess.
- **Use Excel functions** to pull out the text that follows **keywords**
  - Examples: Create a monthly list of **Stressors** to find emerging issues, **or** a list of **Successes** for a report.
  - *See the* ***Collect Meaningful Data: Data Quality–Excel Tips and Tricks*** *emPower Tool*
- **Use codes to test theories**
  - Example: You theorize legalized pot may be impacting families. For six months, ask home visitors to note "**Pot**" when it's an issue, then type up 1-2 sentences on how pot seems to be impacting the family.
- Use a **set of keywords** to gather data on multiple topics. Create a name that is easy to remember, like **STOP**:
  - **S**tressors
  - **T**opics Covered
  - **Outstanding** goals
  - **P**arenting tips

Focus Groups

See the ***Conducting a Focus Group*** *emPower Tool for more details*

What is a focus group?

Focus Groups are structured discussions, with a handful of participants, and 1-2 facilitators, to collect feedback

Why a Focus Group?

Focus Groups can help you delve more deeply into a topic and get more meaningful data from respondents. It also signals to staff and/or clients that you are listening, and care about their voices.

Why not just do a survey?

Surveys don't work for everyone, or for every project! Many cultures find the forced choices uncomfortable, and surveys only let you dig so deeply into stories.

How to Conduct a Focus Group

1. **Choose an able moderator**
   Should be able to guide a conversation and tease out informative responses from a diverse group *(not someone the group will want to impress).*
2. **Develop interview guide**
   Plan questions to ask and a schedule for how long to spend on each question. Move from general to specific questions.
3. **Set a relaxed tone**
   Create an environment where people can be comfortable and encourage quiet people to participate. Supply snacks!
4. **Establish ground rules**
   Create an atmosphere of trust and safety by setting ground rules and covering housekeeping issues.
5. **Do an ice breaker**
   Use a quick, fun icebreaker to help people to get to know each other. This helps build trust and gets people talking.
6. **Moderate, don't participate**
   Be sure the moderator probes well but does not bias the data by contributing thoughts or encouraging a particular answer.
7. **Ask open-ended questions**
   Use open-ended questions to get people talking and bouncing off of each other's ideas; probe to get people talking more.
8. **Seek clarity**
   Summarize and repeat back answers. Probe to ensure you are getting the most accurate, complete responses.
9. **Record when possible**
   To make it easier to analyze the data, record the sessions and transcribe it afterward. Have respondents use fake names.
10. **Limit size & questions**
    Have between 3 and 7 respondents, if possible. Plan for 3-4 questions per hour max.

Interviews

See the Collect Meaningful Data: Conducting One-on-One Interviews emPower Tool for more details

What is an interview?

One-on-one interviews are structured (firm set of questions) or semi-structured (questions & probes to allow for the conversation to evolve) conversations with one facilitator asking one respondent questions to explore more deeply into a few topics.

Why an Interview?

Interviews can collect deeper, more detailed info than a survey, but it takes a LOT longer to collect robust (strong) data and analyze the responses.

How to Conduct an Interview

1. **Have a Clear Research Plan**
   Be sure you have a clear vision of what you want or need to know and write the questions to get that information. We can help with this process!
2. **Develop Interview Guide**
   Create a schedule of structured or semi-structured questions to consistently ask all respondents the same series of questions
3. **Meet in a Quiet Place**
   Meet where respondents (and interviewer!) will feel safe and confident sharing personal information. Be sure it's quiet for recording.
4. **Question Order**
   Establish trust and help get the respondent talking by starting with an easy question. Ask interesting questions early to help get the respondent engaged.
5. **Record Interviews**
   Give the respondent your full attention and keep your hands free (don't take notes). You can use a Voice Memo app on your phone, then transfer memos to a computer.

Oral Histories

Check out oralhistory.org for more information, including best practices for collecting oral histories

What is an Oral History?

Oral histories are people telling their own stories in their own voice.

An oral history can be a collection and/or study of historical information about individuals, families, important events, or everyday life.

Oral histories are often **audio and/or video recorded** to also harness the power of voice and the visual image of the person telling their own story

Why use an Oral History?

Oral Histories are powerful for recording the **history of a program** and the **people** (staff and/or clients).

Example: Consider collecting oral histories with founders and long-term staff to tell their story of working with the program.

Oral Histories allow a person to **tell a story from start to finish**. Consider collecting oral histories with families who have done really well in a program

With their permission, you can use their experiences to show other families **what is possible**.

Oral Histories **humanize** the storyteller. Consider sharing oral histories to remind funders and others that you are working with real, whole, complex, human beings, not just numbers.

How do we collect Oral Histories?

Create a **SHORT interview Schedule** with very open-ended questions. Make minimal interruptions—just let the person talk.

Photovoice/Photo Elicitation

See examples and learn more at hprcd.org/photovoice and see the Capturing Stories with Photovoice emPower Tool

Photovoice is using photographs, video or images to structure and probe more deeply into conversations and stories. ***Example***: have clients photograph their life for a week or a month or use an app like "1 Second Everyday."

- **Idea:** Use the pics to guide a conversation about how the program, staff or stressors impact their daily lives. ***Example***: use other images or videos to structure a conversation ("What do you think of when you see this picture?" "What does this remind you of?").
- **Idea:** Match the photos to quotes from their responses for a big visual impact.

Testimonials

TIP: Use images with quotes for a social media campaign, or in program publicity materials (brochures, website, banquets, etc.)

All of this qualitative data can be used as powerful testimonials (with permission) to share your story with:

- **Staff:** keep current staff motivated, and attract possible future staff with real stories
- **Clients:** keep clients engaged and empowered, and attract future clients
- **Funders:** show the powerful human impact of your work to keep funders engaged and excited
- **Community:** show the community how you are supporting them holistically