**Overview of Ways to Collect Information**

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| **Method** | **Overall Purpose** | **Advantages** | **Challenges** |
| questionnaires, surveys,  checklists | when need to quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way | -can complete anonymously -inexpensive to administer -easy to compare and analyze -administer to many people -can get lots of data -many sample questionnaires already exist | -might not get careful feedback -wording can bias client's responses -are impersonal -in surveys, may need sampling expert - doesn't get full story |
| interviews | when want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires | -get full range and depth of information -develops relationship with client -can be flexible with client | -can take much time -can be hard to analyze and compare -can be costly -interviewer can bias client's responses |
| documentation review | when want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc. | -get comprehensive and historical information -doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program -information already exists -few biases about information | -often takes much time -info may be incomplete -need to be quite clear about what looking for -not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists |
| observation | to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes | -view operations of a program as they are actually occurring -can adapt to events as they occur | -can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors -can be complex to categorize observations -can influence behaviors of program participants -can be expensive |
| focus groups | explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing | -quickly and reliably get common impressions  -can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time - can convey key information about programs | -can be hard to analyze responses -need good facilitator for safety and closure -difficult to schedule 6-8 people together |
| case studies | to fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases | -fully depicts client's experience in program input, process and results -powerful means to portray program to outsiders | -usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe  -represents depth of information, rather than breadth |

# Source: McNamara, C. Basic Guide to Program Evaluation.

# <https://managementhelp.org/evaluation/program-evaluation-guide.htm>