Evaluation Techniques
A quick overview
SAMPLING

Choosing your sample
When evaluating for a project’s impact or outcome, it is important that your sample is as representative as possible of the whole population of interest in your community (your ‘target group’). This means that the information you collect from your sample is a good reflection of your target group as a whole.

Who?
It’s often not possible to reach each and every person in your target group. Therefore it is important to choose an appropriate sample of people to investigate when evaluating your project.

Start by going back to your aims and objectives. Brainstorm the individual attributes or qualities that define your target group. Then choose the most important attributes to determine a useful range of people to study.

Common attributes to consider are age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.

How many?
Sample size is a very important issue because samples that are too large may waste time, resources and money, while samples that are too small may lead to inaccurate results.

It is possible to calculate appropriate sample size statistically, but this can get complicated!

As a rule of thumb, for a focus group, 6 – 12 people per group is a good number, and it’s useful to run several groups, perhaps grouped by attribute (e.g. gender).

For a questionnaire/survey or one-on-one interviews for community projects, generally the more, the better! Consider your project objectives, how big your target group is and the data collection technique you want to use (see below for more on techniques) when deciding on your intended sample size.
DATA COLLECTION

Types of data

There are two broad categories of data...

“QUALITATIVE”
words, open-ended questions, unstructured/semi-structured, discussion format
opinions, views, ideas, awareness, recall

“QUANTITATIVE”
numbers – measuring, counting, closed questions (yes/no), scaled questions
(not at all – very much so) structured, survey format
how many, how much, awareness, knowledge, beliefs, recognition, behaviour

…and different ways to collect information from your target group, including:

- Focus groups
- One-on-one interviews (face-to-face / telephone)
- Surveys / Questionnaires

Choosing your data collection technique

Consider the objectives and KPIs of your project. Ask yourself:

Are my project’s objectives / KPIs…

...about ‘numbers’ (i.e. X information kits delivered)?

Survey/Questionnaire

...about ‘words’ (i.e. opinions / views / awareness)?

One-on-one interviews
Focus groups

...about ‘numbers’ and ‘words’?
(e.g. raising awareness in this many people)

One-on-one interviews
Survey/Questionnaire
QUESTIONNAIRE / SURVEY

Questionnaires are relatively formal and are mostly ‘self-administered’. Questions can be designed to find out key characteristics, feedback about the project’s methods, format and strategies (i.e. the processes used) and the outcomes of the project – the information or skills gained, and changes in behaviour, attitudes, lifestyle and health.

Pilot testing is very useful. Have someone else look at the questionnaire to make sure you’re asking the right questions and getting the answers you’re after. Ideally, you would pilot the questionnaire with members of your target group.

Piloting the questionnaire gives you a final opportunity to address any problems with language, presentation or instructions. You will also get an idea of how long your questionnaire takes to complete.

QUESTIONNAIRES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to develop and distribute and an efficient way of gathering information from a large number of people.</td>
<td>Potential issues of literacy and comprehension – questions need to be carefully worded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to count and compute answers.</td>
<td>Responses are restricted to the questions asked – topics cannot be elaborated upon beyond what is in the questionnaire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive data (e.g. percentage of respondents who answered ‘yes’ etc) are easy to extract.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can collect both qualitative and quantitative data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants can remain anonymous.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With a sufficient sample size, it is possible to generalise results to the target population.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences/factors can be considered in terms of their degree of importance or impact.*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This involves statistical analyses.

Features of a good questionnaire

- Short
- Easy to understand
- Easy to administer
- Easy to code and analyse

A questionnaire should be set out neatly and provide plenty of space so it is clear and easy to follow. Where possible, headings can be used to break the questionnaire into sections so it is easy to read. If certain questions are to be skipped by some respondents, clear instructions should be given.
FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups draw out rich qualitative data, answering questions that begin with who, which, what, when, where and why. This research method attempts to capture people’s opinions, beliefs, experiences, meanings and descriptions of events.

Ideally, focus groups should have no fewer than 6 people and no more than 12 people. Groups can run for anywhere between 1-2 hours. More than one focus group is recommended to get a good overview of key themes for your project. Focus groups can be tape recorded (you must have consent from participants to do this) to allow you to transcribe discussions in full.

Consider individual factors when recruiting for your focus groups. Grouping people according to gender, age or other attributes important for your project (e.g. smokers, non-smokers) is useful and helps facilitate discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS GROUPS</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Useful for exploring – to investigate opinions, new ideas and explore topics further</td>
<td>Requires skill in group facilitation, asking questions and interpreting results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very flexible – can give very rich data, gives respondents the freedom to express complexity and diversity</td>
<td>The findings may not represent the views of larger segments of the population</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Features of a good focus group

- Comfortable environment
- Appropriate time of day
- Clear instructions to participants about boundaries (e.g. respect for each other’s opinions)
- Everyone has a chance to participate
- Focus group is semi-structured – broad ideas or questions to open and facilitate discussion
- Group facilitator guides discussion without leading or biasing responses
ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS
(FACE-TO-FACE / TELEPHONE)

Interviews can be ‘semi-structured’ and collect information using techniques from both the ‘questionnaire’ and ‘focus group’ methods of data collection.

Interviews can be a mix of open and closed questions.

### Advantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gather information on a range of issues</td>
<td>Time-consuming to undertake and analyse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can clarify questions and probe for further information</td>
<td>No anonymity for participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can collect both qualitative and quantitative data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Features of a good interview

- Appropriate time of day
- Clear instructions
- Interviewer does not lead responses to open questions
- Short
- Easy to understand
- Easy to code and analyse
DESIGNING QUESTIONS

As a general rule – questionnaires, interviews and focus groups should begin with the easy non-threatening questions, leaving the more difficult questions until later.

Respondents or participants should not be asked questions early on that will influence their answers to questions asked later on.

Open-ended questions
Open-ended questions should be carefully worded to be clear and unambiguous.

Some issues to consider:
- Avoid asking two questions at once (e.g. what did you think about the project message and project materials?)
- Avoid an initial statement of alleged fact on which the question is then based (e.g. As there is a problem with binge drinking in your community, what do you think should be done?)
- Avoid building your question on a hidden premise (e.g. Asking participants in a focus group for a smoking cessation project “When did you realise you could never give up smoking?”)

Closed questions
Closed questions can be factual (e.g. how old are you?) or attitudinal (e.g. Do you think binge drinking is a problem in your community?).

Factual questions are easier to ask and more likely to result in an accurate answer, but it is important that questions are not ambiguous. For example: consider the question “When did you first start smoking?” The respondent might give you an answer in terms of their age at which they started smoking, the date, or how many years ago they started to smoke.

You can offer a choice of alternative answers. For example:

What part of the prevention workshop did you find most informative?
- Presentations
- Group Discussions
- Professional development

Questions can also offer a ‘scale’ for rating. For example:

How informative did you find the following parts of the prevention workshop?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very informative</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Not at all informative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# EXAMINING YOUR DATA

This is a basic summary of how to convert your data into useful, meaningful and relevant information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editing</th>
<th>Quantitative data</th>
<th>Qualitative data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Check the data for completeness, consistency and clarity</td>
<td>Check the data for completeness, consistency and clarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Coding | Convert data into numbers that can be counted and tabulated | Some coding of words, phrases, themes or ideas may be appropriate |

| Data entry | Enter numerical data into appropriate computer program (e.g. Excel) | Transcribe discussions |

| Organising and sorting | Count the number of cases falling into each category of measurement (a ‘frequency distribution’) | Sort by question number and / or other characteristic |

| Understanding and interpreting | Use descriptive statistics to summarise and interpret information. Take time to become familiar with the information, discuss, reflect about meaning. | Take time to become familiar with the information, discuss, reflect about meaning. Look for themes. |

| Presenting | Prepare tables, graphs, percentages, rates etc | Describe themes, summarise information, select key quotes |

| Communicating | Present results and recommendations orally, visually or in written form | Present results and recommendations orally, visually or in written form |