

# CHOOSING THE DATA COLLECTION METHOD THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR EVALUATION



When evaluating an initiative, such as a program, event, project, or training opportunity, you may have several different questions that you would like to answer. Common examples include “How many people participated in this event?”, “Did participants’ increase their knowledge after the training module?”, or “How can we improve this program for next season?”. When choosing the most appropriate data collection method(s), it is important to keep in mind the different types of data you may wish to collect, and how these data can help to answer your evaluation questions. There are two main types of data:

► **Quantitative** data methods are numerical and help to understand evaluation questions related to *what* or *how many*.



► **Qualitative** data methods are descriptive or narrative (using words or pictures) and allow us to answer evaluation questions related to *how* and *why* something occurs.



Below, we describe several different methods that can be used to help answer your evaluation questions.

## Surveys



*“We aim to gather data from a lot of our members in a short amount of time.”*

**Surveys** are a great way for sport organizations to collect data from a large sample of stakeholders, including athletes, parents, officials, and/or staff. Surveys can be administered both in-person (e.g., using paper copies or presented orally) or through digital platforms (e.g., Google Forms). There are varying options that exist for collecting data through surveys. Choices include:

SURVEY TYPE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
<b>After the Initiative</b>	The most commonly used type of survey is one that is used at the end of a season, event, or initiative to gauge stakeholder insight.	A paper survey is handed out to attendees after a coaching seminar to understand their satisfaction and learning outcomes associated with participation.
<b>Before and After the Initiative</b>	<p>This type of survey involves asking the same questions both before and after engaging in an initiative. By doing this, we can compare the results to see if there were increases, decreases, or no changes over time.</p> <p>Depending on the length of the initiative, you may wish to add in a third time point and have participants complete the same questions at the beginning, middle and end. This approach is typically used for longer initiatives (i.e., 1+ years).</p>	<p>At the beginning of the season, athletes are asked to complete a survey where they reflect on their leadership skills on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), such as “I am confident leading warm-ups for my team”.</p> <p>At season end, athletes are asked to complete the same survey.</p>

<b>After the Initiative with Retrospective Reflection</b>	With a retrospective survey, stakeholders are asked to rate their current knowledge, skill, and/or attitudes and then to reflect back and rate that same element before participating in the initiative	In a 2-day coaching seminar on gender equity in basketball, a questionnaire is used to ask questions about coaches' prior knowledge of the topic BEFORE attending the training and AFTER attending the training.
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While most surveys include quantitative data, they can also be used to gather qualitative data. For example, at the end of a survey, you may ask open-ended questions such as “What was your favourite part of the season?” or “What recommendations do you have for this coaching seminar in the future?”.

## Document Review



***“We collect information through routine practices such as registration forms or meeting minutes and want to see what we can learn from it.”***

Many sport stakeholders already collect data without even realizing it! For example, existing documents and data can be reviewed as one way to answer evaluation questions. This data may include quantitative data (e.g., intake, attendance, or feedback forms; website/social media analytics) or qualitative data (e.g., past reports or meeting minutes).

## Interviews and Focus Groups



***“We are interested in working with a smaller sample to get more rich, nuanced data.”***

Conducting interviews and focus groups can help you gain an in-depth understanding of perceptions or opinions on a topic from one or more stakeholder groups. These methods allow you to verbally ask participants open-ended questions and can be run in-person or virtually. Interviews are conducted with a single participant and allow for an in-depth understanding of an individual’s perspective. In contrast, focus groups are group-based (~4-7 participants) and can provide the added value of having rich conversations between participants. Interviews and focus groups typically last anywhere from 30-90 minutes in length.

## Observations



***“We are visual learners and have capacity to document our programming through note-taking, audio, and/or video.”***

Seeing is believing! Observations can be another rich source of data with the potential to provide meaningful information relevant to your evaluation. For example, you can observe a series of games at the U12 age group within your organization to better understand the impact of a rule change at this age level.

## Creative Methods



*“We value unique and engaging approaches that are inclusive to individuals of varying ages and abilities.”*

Arts-based approaches offer a unique way to collect data from stakeholders that is fun, engaging, and helps address language or comprehension barriers. Specifically, these methods are ideal to gather insight from children and youth, individuals with cognitive or verbal impairments, or anyone who does not speak English as a first language—but they can be used with anyone. Creative methods can include arts-based (such as story-telling, drawing, or using photos) or movement-based (that incorporate physical activity and play) methods. Within sport, movement-based activities are ideal ways to gain insight from youth athletes on a particular evaluation topic, as the data collection process can also double as a program activity during a practice.

### A few things to keep in mind when choosing your evaluation method(s):

- ▶ **What data do you already collect?** Is there information gathered within your initiative that can be used to answer important evaluation questions, or do you need to gather new information from stakeholders?
- ▶ **Timeline:** When will the initiative begin and end? Has it already ended? How long were people engaged in the initiative? What are feasible methods for you and your stakeholders to undertake within this timeline?
- ▶ **Number of stakeholders involved:** Are there less than 10 individuals involved or over 50? Does it have regular participants?
- ▶ **Type of initiative:** Is it a one-time event, like a training or conference, or is it a 1-year or multi-year program?
- ▶ **Using multiple methods:** Depending on your evaluation questions, and your capacity, you may choose to use a combination of data collection tools/methods. For example, quantitative survey can be administered before conducting a focus group.
- ▶ **Accountability:** What information do your stakeholders (such as funders or board of directors) require? If there are specific indicators that you need to report on, make sure you are collecting the data that will allow you to do so.