

Interviews and focus groups

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Agenda

- Getting ready for qualitative data collection
- Interviewing
- Leading focus groups
- Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data



Why listen?

- Align library resources and services to community needs.
- Give voice to community members who you might not hear from at the library.
- Show your commitment to being responsive to emerging needs.
- Discover strengths and areas for improvement.





We Are an Edge Library

The leadership tool for 21st century libraries.
<http://www.libraryedge.org/>

Another reason to listen:

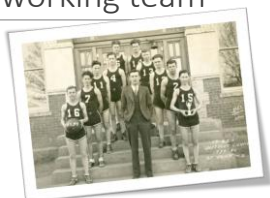
Qualitative data is critical to the needs assessment activities in Benchmarks 4-6

Get ready to go!

PLANNING YOUR LISTENING CAMPAIGN IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

Assemble your working team

- ✓ Library managers
- ✓ Library board/friends
- ✓ Local government staff
- ✓ Peer agency staff
- ✓ Patrons



People who can help you:

- Understand the needs of your community
- Understand expectations in your political environment
- Connect with underserved communities
- Roll up their sleeves and do the work

Gather existing data into a community profile

- What existing data can tell you:
- Who lives in your service area
 - What kinds of lives they lead
 - What they might need
 - How patrons are using the library

- Data sources:
- Census/ACS
 - Broadband USA
 - Community indicators
 - City/county surveys
 - Education agency
 - Employment agency
 - Library records
 - Media
 - Public records
 - Other research

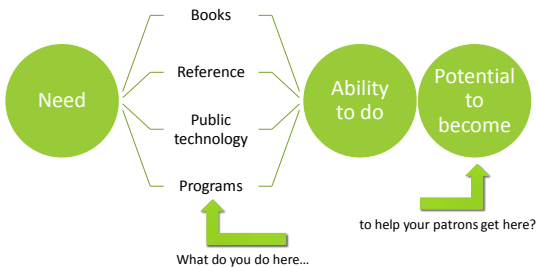


What do you need to know?

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| About your community: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important issues facing your community? • What do your community members need in order to be successful? • What kind of community do you aspire to be? • How is the library perceived by the community? |
| About the library: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the library support community goals? • How does the library support patrons? • How does the library support other organizations? • What information would help you make decisions about programs to support community goals? |
| About your patrons: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are we serving? Where? • What are their biggest needs? Why? • Do our programs help them? How? • Do they value the library in the ways we expect? |



Theory of change: Having, Knowing, Doing

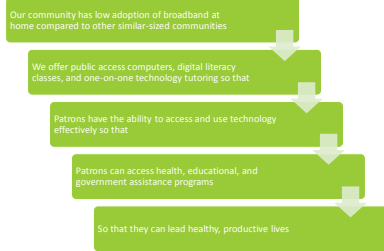


Activity 1

WRITE A THEORY OF CHANGE FROM A CASE STUDY



Example



Data collection methods

CHOOSING THE RIGHT METHOD FOR YOUR INFORMATION NEEDS



The voices approach

The goal is to hear from a variety of voices who can:

- Confirm/refute your theory of change
- Provide a more nuanced understanding of how your services affect change in your patrons and community
- Create a shared vision and solutions to community problems
- (and while you're there, get some good data for advocacy)



Primary types of data and collection

QUANTITATIVE

- Get at the "what"
- Descriptive data about your population
 - Programmatic data (counts, analytics)
 - Survey data

Often used in summative evaluation & formal reports

QUALITATIVE

- Get at the "how" and "why" of outcomes
- Interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Survey data (open-ended questions)
 - Observations

Often used in formative evaluation & for storytelling



Capturing richness

Survey question:

In the past 12 months have you used a library computer or wifi connection to communicate with family and friends?

Yes No

Interview/focus group question:

How have you used a library computer or wifi connection to communicate with family and friends?

"We used the library computer when hurricane Ike left us without power for 2 weeks. The library had power so we were able to communicate with relatives and get news. Some days that was the only outside communication we had. FEMA took over the cell phones so we needed to let people know we were ok."



Considerations

- Capacity (people & money)
- Availability of expertise
- Scale of the respondent pool
- Community/key stakeholder acceptability
 - What are other departments in your municipality doing?
 - What is the expectation for rigor?



Interviews & Focus Groups

HOW TO START LISTENING



When to use

- During design and implementation
- Testing theory of change
- Developing indicators
- Gathering impact data
- Developing/testing survey questions



Types of interviews/focus groups

Structured: when you know the relevant questions

- Leader in control
- Pre-determined questions
- Systematic/everyone gives a response

Semi-structured: when you want to probe for more information

- Leader provides questions from guide, but phrasing may vary
- Respondents may touch on related issues, digress, and expand

Deliberative dialogue/unstructured: when you want to understand complexities, perceptions, experiences

- Leader introduces a topic and provide background
- Conversational/follow-up probes developed during interview
- Respondents engage in discussion with each other (focus groups)

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Best practices

PREPARATION AND PRACTICE IS KEY FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Ethics

Understand your ethical obligations

- Respect your subjects
- Pay special attention to vulnerable populations
- Don't ask more than you need to know
- Don't put potential subjects in a position where they can't say no to participating

Have a plan

- Prepare guides well in advance to help you focus on the information you need.
- Limit your main questions to 2-5.
- Avoid leading questions that might influence responses
- Ask some wondering questions (If you could...)
- Make appointments, arrange for child care if appropriate.
- Find a physically comfortable, quiet location.



Collect for quality, not quantity

- Test your instruments
- Train your interviewers/group leaders
- Search YouTube for “research interview” or “research focus group” and watch different techniques.
- Practice role playing
- Be consistent and timely



Fear not!

- Your patrons and your community want to tell you what they think and will appreciate the opportunity to talk to you.
- You will learn a lot and probably enjoy doing it.
- While it’s usually preferable to have fresh faces conducting interviews and leading focus groups, you can still do this with limited staff.



Practice, practice, practice

- Read your questions out loud, to your cat, in your shower, to your friends and co-workers. Make sure they sound and feel like natural conversation.
- Work on appearing neutral and interested in your body language and reactions to the information provided.
- Practice note taking too. It can be hard to listen, question, and take notes at the same time.
- Make a list of follow-up questions based on your practice sessions.



Give space

- **Don't rush answers.** Use silence strategically to help respondents reflect on their answers and further explain.
- **Echo response and then ask for more.** Take a pause before seeking clarifications or additional information and reflect on what else you need to ask. Be careful about getting side tracked.
- **Be careful about body language**—there's a sometimes fine line between nodding as encouragement to continue and nodding as encouraging wrapping up.



Wrap-up

- Give the subject an opportunity to add unstructured comments.
- Restate any conditions you've agreed to (e.g., confidentiality, use of responses in advocacy materials).
- Remind them how their information will be used (and get contact information if necessary).
- Express appreciation.
- Express appreciation again.



Interviews

“A CONVERSATION WITH A PURPOSE”

One-on-one interviews

- Allows you to enter another person’s world and understand their perspective.
- Lets you learn about things you can’t observe or are too sensitive to discuss in groups.
- Interviewer needs to create a comfortable, safe space for subjects to be open and honest. Consider doing interviews in patrons’ homes.
- Easier to have some structure (interview guides) to keep conversation on track and make sure you get the information you need. Increase structure with increased numbers of subjects.

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Questions to ask

- **Experiences and behaviors:** What has the person done or is doing now? What would you observe if you were able to?
- **Opinions and beliefs:** What does the person think about the topic? What are his/her goals, intentions, desires, and values?
- **Feelings:** What emotional responses do they have?
- **Knowledge:** Use to find out what factual information the subject has.
- **Sensory:** What is the person’s sensory experience? What did they see, hear, smell, touch, or taste?
- **Background/demographics:** Basic identifying characteristics that helps contextualize information in relation to other people.

Sequencing

- Open interview with noncontroversial present behaviors, experiences, and activities.
- Focus probes on gaining more detail and a fuller description (elaboration) or on clarifying previous answers.
- Ask about opinions and feelings about the activity previously described.
- Shift to future (or past) oriented questions.
- Intersperse demographic/background questions after trust has been established.



Exercise 2

Part 1:

Write out one interview question about a point in your theory of change. Write down two possible follow-up questions that tease out an important aspect of the issue you would need to know to make a decision.

Part 2:

Pair up with a person sitting next to you and ask your question. Listen carefully and take notes.

If appropriate, ask your follow-up questions or ask another question that steers back to your follow-up questions.



Focus Groups

GENERATIVE CONVERSATIONS



Focus groups

- Good at getting at **group** meanings, processes, and norms
- Understanding a problem from multiple perspectives
- Stimulates linking/surfacing of experiences and ideas
- Not a “group interview”
- Not good to ask about behavior or attitudes
- Can support development/interpretation of surveys
- Good for less pressured/sensitive discussions
- Allows for more interviews in shorter period of time
- Requires group management skills
- Best to have notes where everyone can see them
- Helpful to record sessions



Key question types

- **Normative understanding:** What role is the library expected to serve in the community?
- **Group meaning:** What does the library *say* (reflect) about the community? Why is storytime important?
- **Group processes/strategies:** How can the library help with <insert issue> in our community? How should the library prepare to serve future generations?



Sequencing

- **Opening questions:** get acquainted and comfortable with each other quickly. Not meant to collect demographic information or any that emphasizes differences.
- **Introduction:** Basic question to introduce the topic and get participants to think about their experiences in the area you are asking about. Could ask for a definition (What is a library?) or an experience (Tell us about the first time you remember visiting a library).
- **2-5 Key questions:** Heart of the purpose of the focus group, what you *need to know* in order to make decisions
- **Follow-ons:** Ranking, “all things considered”, What would you say to...
- **Summary agreement:** Summarize responses to key questions and ask if it captures the gist.



Using qualitative data

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS BEYOND ANECDOTES

Organizing your data

- Write up your notes and observations from interviews/focus groups immediately after the session.
- Transcribe tapes.
- Put together guides, transcriptions, and notes into a notebook.
- Read your materials over several times.

Coding and theming

- Write short descriptions of emerging themes or patterns and note where they appear in transcripts or notes.
- Note deviations from common themes.
- Note external influences on attitudes or behaviors and link to themes.
 - E.g., Having children is associated with greater diversity of outcomes across domains.
- Highlight interesting or illustrative stories.

Write up results

- Note your evaluation questions, methods, and processes.
- Summarize each case—write a narrative of the interview or subject in terms of your interview questions and follow-up questions.
- Identify cases that share similar themes and explain the conditions subjects revealing the same themes were similar or different.
- Explain how the results have answered your evaluation questions.
- Explain any action or follow-up you will take as a result

