Quick Tips

Methods for Collecting Information

- **Survey:** collecting standardized information through structured questionnaires to generate quantitative data. Surveys may be mailed (surface and electronic), completed on site or through interviews, either face-to-face or telephone. Sample surveys use probability or purposive sampling.
- **Case Study:** in-depth examination of a particular case (program, group of participants, single individual, site/location). Case studies use multiple sources of information and methods to provide as complete a picture as possible.
- **Interviews:** information collected by talking with and listening to people, either face-to-face or over the telephone. Interviews range on a continuum from those which are tightly structured (as in a survey) to free flowing, conversational interviews.
- **Observation:** collecting information through "seeing" and "listening." Observations may be structured or unstructured.
- **Group assessment:** use of group processes to collect evaluation information such as nominal group technique, focus group, Delphi, brainstorming and community forums.
- **Expert or peer review:** examination by a review committee, panel of experts or peers.
- **Portfolio reviews:** collection of materials, including samples of work, that encompass the breadth and scope of the program activity being evaluated.
- **Testimonials:** individual statements by people indicating personal responses and reactions.
- **Tests:** use of established standards to assess knowledge, skill, performance such as in pen-and-pencil tests or skills tests.
- **Photographs, slides, videos:** use of photography to capture visual images.
- **Diaries, journals:** recording of events over time revealing the personal perspective of the writer/recorder.
- **Logs:** recording of chronological entries which are usually brief and factual.
- **Document analysis:** use of content analysis and other techniques to analyze and summarize printed material and existing information.
- **Other:**
  Action cards: use of index cards on which participants record what they did – the "action" – and when they reach their goal; primarily used in self-assessment.
  Simulations: use of models or mock-ups to solicit perceptions and reactions.
  Problem stories: narrative accounts of past, present or future situations as a means of identifying perceptions using fictional characters to externalize the problem situation.
  Creative expression: use of art forms to represent people's ideas and feeling as through stories, drama, dance, music, art.
  Unobtrusive measures: the gathering of information without the knowledge of the people in the setting such as the wear and tear on a "planted" mat in front of a display.

References:

Bickman, L., & Rog, D. (Eds). (1998). *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pretty, J., Guijt, I., Thompson, J., & Scoones, I. (1995). *Participatory Learning and Action: A Trainer's Guide.* London: International Institute for Environment & Development.