The Basics: Focus groups, listening sessions and interviews

A Communities of Opportunity Workshop
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We gather today on the ancestral land of the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish People.
We honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish Tribe, and all of the Native people who call King County home.

This acknowledgement is one small step against the erasure of our Native communities. In addition to the Duwamish, King County is home to the traditional lands of the Muckleshoot, Snoqualmie, and Tulalip tribes and other Coast Salish people. Today, King County is home to a vibrant and diverse community of indigenous people from across North America and beyond.

Resources:
https://www.duwamishtribe.org/land-acknowledgement
https://www.realrentduwamish.org/land-acknowledgement.html
http://www.ala.org/aboutala/indigenous-tribes-seattle-and-washington
What will we cover today?

- What is qualitative data?
- Focus group, interview basics
- Collecting data
- Collecting data while social distancing
- Analyzing data
- Applying findings
- Questions and Resources

The purpose of this workshop is to give an overview of qualitative data collection, things to think about before, during and after your qualitative data collection. For example, we will cover question writing, coding data and analyses at a high level rather than in depth. The final slides offer resources for additional help.
Remember throughout the process

- Involve community to help ensure accuracy of information
- Pay attention to equity & representation
- Ensure human subjects protection
- Protect participants (minimize risk)
- Work from evaluation questions
- Check and minimize bias

Evaluation frameworks give guidelines to focus questions, methods, analyses and interpretation. Evaluation methods include how to get accurate, reliable information. A community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach can help lead to more accurate results.

The field is also moving toward equitable evaluation, which emphasizes that evaluators should be aware of equity at all times and consider equity issues at every evaluation stage. This means, for example, thinking about how access differs, do findings differ for some groups, does data collection include asking about systemic barriers and opportunities. But also creating chances and opportunities to understand strengths.

An accurate evaluation conducted in partnership with community within an equity frame is more likely to result in useful actionable findings.

Resources:
https://www.equitableeval.org/

https://www.racialequitytools.org/evaluate
What is qualitative data?

Based on opinions

“I would not go back to that hospital because it felt really disorganized.”

Experiences

“They lost my paperwork and I had to wait forever to be seen. It felt disrespectful.”

Perceptions

“The problem is they don’t have enough staff.”

Qualitative information is usually gathered to gain insight and explanation. It often gathers information that is not typically measured, and is gathered through methods like interviews, observation, group discussions, written document review. Most often, qualitative data are analyzed for themes through analysis. These examples are from a healthcare setting, but it can be used for almost any context!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Ideal Use</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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| Interview         | Fully understand someone’s thoughts, explore a topic or ideas, or learn more about survey answers | • can take a lot of time  
• can be hard to analyze and compare  
• can be costly  
• interviewer can bias client's responses |
| Focus group       | Explore a topic in depth through group discussion                         | • can be hard to analyze responses  
• need good facilitator for safety and closure  
• can be difficult to schedule 6-10 people together |
| Listening session | Partner with community members to explore a topic in depth with group     | • Like focus groups, can be hard to schedule  
• Extra time needed to collaborate with community partner  
• Partner can facilitate, or facilitation shared |

A summary of limitations and use by data collection method
Collecting data while social distancing

- Think about using phone, video and online methods
  - Online focus groups
  - Phone and video interviews
  - Discussion boards/online groups for getting input
- Consider who is not reachable using the method chosen
- Story submissions
- Consider access to technology and who methods do not reach
- Learn through piloting and adapt

We are definitely facing unique times and will need unique approaches for data collection. Mail is still an option but can be more expensive and takes longer to get data in and electronically available. We and colleagues all over have been thinking about using phone, video and online resources. Focus groups can be held through online meetings, and also using bulletin boards to allow people more time to react to the question and other people’s reactions.

The key piece is that we a) pilot and b) learn and see how to improve. The PDSA cycle is shorthand for testing a change by developing a plan to test the change (Plan), carrying out the test (Do), observing and learning from the consequences (Study), and determining what modifications should be made to the test (Act).

http://www.ihi.org/resources/Pages/Tools/PlanDoStudyActWorksheet.aspx
Collecting data during social distancing:
Remote qualitative data collection

- Diaries
- Mapping exercise
- Letters (Email, mail, uploads)
- Online Discussion platforms
- Story completion through online survey (SurveyMonkey, Qualtrix)
- Asynchronous interviews using video, shared word documents
- App-based data collection methods

Some options to consider. References:
  https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbdTuTgfrhibHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/edit?ts=5e88ae0a#
What ways to collect qualitative data best fit your needs and why?

Use polling or chat box to solicit ideas from group [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-meetings](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-meetings)

As we talk about methods for collecting information and analyzing it, we’re going to focus on interviews, listening sessions and focus groups. The key points apply to other ways of data collection like observation, open-ended survey questions, and photo/voice efforts. The ideas we’ll discuss are applicable to other methods (e.g. recording participants and asking for informed consent, stripping data of identifiers, assessing equity along the way).

These social distancing times present new challenges at a time when information is sorely needed. Take a minute or two and think about the project you have in mind, why you came to this workshop maybe. Of the options for collecting data we talked about, which ones fit your situation? What audience do you want to reach, what do you want to ask them about, and which method might fit your situation?
Planning your data collection

• Focus group/interview/data collection guide
• Recruitment
• Logistics
• Informing participants of purpose, process and how their risks are minimized

Planning for data collection helps ensure you get the answers you are looking for while minimizing bias.
During data collection: Why develop procedures?

- Write down data collection procedures – being specific and precise helps counter biases
- When possible, pretest or pilot your interview or focus group questions (e.g. interview a potential participant using questions, ask whether questions clear)
- Create a one-page information sheet about the purpose of data collection and how confidentiality will be protected
- Inform or request consent for participation, include
  - Purpose of effort/data collection
  - Contact person and details for any questions
  - Potential risk to participants
  - How confidentiality is kept secure
- Identify how data will be received, stored, saved and analyzed (plan for it a bit)

Note on consent – participants should understand what you're doing in the evaluation and how any information associated with them will be reported. You should clearly state terms of confidentiality regarding access to evaluation results. They should have the right to participate or not. Either have them read and sign consent form, or have information sheet which indicates that remaining to participate (or continuing with survey) indicates consent.
Interview guide: What to ask?

- Use evaluation questions to inform question selection
- Test/get feedback on questions prior to use
- Start with an introduction: welcome participants and agree on goals and group norms.
- Develop open-ended questions, with neutral follow-up questions (prompts) that you can use if needed.
- Just like developing survey questions, avoid confusing or leading questions and unclear words.
- Use accessible language
- The guide is not a script...

These general considerations are useful for planning both focus groups and individual interviews.

Developing questions:
Think about a natural flow; don’t ask the hardest or a sensitive question first.
I recommend considering about half a dozen questions (plus prompts). You may need to prioritize.
Avoid leading questions.
Try to stick to an 8th grade reading level. You can check this in Microsoft word.

The guide is not a script: It should be helpful to follow it, but you don’t need to read directly from it and you are allowed to ask follow-up questions for further details or clarification.
What is a more neutral question?

“What do you think the Mariners are doing wrong this season?”

What is a neutral way to ask this question? “How do you feel about how the Mariners are doing this season?”

WHY: you want credible information that honestly answers your question. If the question is leading, you’re not getting that, it’s not useful.
Writing a good question

- Keep it simple: one individual question at a time
- Make question clear, specific and direct
- Use familiar, understandable language & vocabulary
- Avoid biased or loaded words/terms
- List most important questions first
- Do not force responses
- Keep guide/questions short and relevant
- Test the survey beforehand whenever possible

A well-worded question will mean the same thing to everyone.

Make sure answers are complete/exhaustive (all possibilities present) - For example, if the respondent may not know the answer to your question, include a "don't know" response.

Logistics for in person collection

Do’s
- Signage so location is easy to find
- Comfortable space
- Accessible restrooms
- If needed, consider offering food & childcare
- Clear visuals (if using)
- Name tags for groups
- Way to document (notes, recording)

Things to avoid
- Loud/distracting environments
- Cramped or uncomfortable spaces
- Food that inhibits dialogue (ie especially loud, messy)

This slide applies to in-person data collection and will likely be simpler for one-on-one interviews, but most of these considerations still apply. These things all probably seem pretty self-evident, but it’s helpful to think them through in advance! All of your work in community organizing applies here too.

Other considerations:
Time (30 min-2hrs, in general)
Recording – video, audio, and/or notes; get permission and explain how it will be used
Setup of chairs for focus group – so participants can see/hear each other
Recruitment: Who will participate?

- If needed, screen participants. For example:
  - Did you participate in XYZ program?
  - Are you a parent/caregiver of a student at ABC school?
  - Did you come to at least 3 XYZ events this year?
- If multiple groups, consider grouping by characteristic (ex: by grade, by school...)
- How many people?
  - Per focus group: 5-10 (you may need to recruit more to account for attrition)
  - “Saturation:” when you’re hearing the same thing over and over, and no new ideas are being contributed

Think about a “representative group.” Whether you are doing interviews or focus groups, you will likely want to hear from different kinds of people that make up the group you want to hear from. Examples could be students in different grades; students at different schools; students of different genders; etc.
Collecting your data

- Make sure participants understand purpose, their rights, and what will happen
- Record audio or video, with permission (may not be necessary/desired)
- Have a colleague take notes (not the facilitator)
- In many cases, you will want participants to have identities protected. If so, have nametags with just numbers or letters: Person A, Person B, etc.
- Demographic (or other) questions: Have participants fill out a short form to hand in on their way out
  - You can then connect their response to their letter or number

Now that I’ve arranged it, how do I collect and summarize information?

Consider multiple ways to get information. For example, people could write down their answers to 1-2 key questions, then participate in focus group.

It’s important to record your data! There are several ways to do so, but whichever you use, be clear with participants about how their input will be recorded and used.

If you take notes, I think it helps for whoever takes notes to use whatever medium they can write most quickly in – for most people that’s typing. It’s also extremely helpful to review notes immediately after the interview or focus group to help clarify anything (you will forget!). Use quotes to show when you’re capturing word for word vs. summarizing.

Demographics. Ex: When people come in, Person 1, and include that person’s (assumed or reported) demographic info. Can use an entry form or observation to document who is in the room. What demographic info do you need to make sure your purpose is met? Share example agreements/norms. Also passive v active consent (ex: you have the right to leave at any time, etc)
Confidentiality: Example

- Protecting your privacy is very important to us. Sharing your personal information during the discussion is your choice, and you do not have to answer any question you wish not to. Others in the group discussion will be asked to keep all information confidential. There is always a small risk of a breach of confidentiality, but we have made every effort to minimize this risk. Please do your part by keeping the things that others share today private.

- Some of the information, experiences, and suggestions you share today will be included in a larger report on our hospital system, but no names or identifying information will be connected to any of that information.

- Some other notes on confidentiality:
  - Participation in today’s discussion is completely voluntary—you decide if you want to participate. You do not have to join the discussion, and you do not have to give a reason. Deciding not to take part will not affect your relationship with [insert name of organization] If you do join and later change your mind, you may leave the group at any time.
  - This is a safe space and you may share anything you wish. However, Washington State Law may require us to report a) some kinds of abuse and b) medical conditions that are under public health surveillance. Examples of things we would need to report are child abuse, abuse, abandonment, neglect, or financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult, sexual assault, serious physical assault, and diseases like HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STDs, and Influenza.

This is an example from youth listening sessions that PHSKC recently held. It’s a lot of text but I’ve highlighted a few points that are important to keep in mind. Ideally you would share this kind of information in writing with participants as well as announce it verbally at the beginning of your focus group or interview. As mentioned before, sometimes you will want a signed copy (if you will be collecting data more than once from the same people, a review board requires it, or you will benefit from proof that you informed participants of their rights) and other times you can use a handout and inform participants of their rights without getting their signature.

It is imperative to let them know that as a facilitator, you are a mandated reporter and some information is legally required to be reported to authorities.

For more on notifiable health conditions:
https://www.doh.wa.gov/forpublichealthandhealthcareproviders/notifiableconditions/listofnotifiableconditions

For more on mandatory reporting laws for vulnerable adults:
https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services/mandatory-and-permissive-reporters#:~:text=Are%20you%20a%20mandatory%20reporter,and%20Health%20Services%20(DSHS).&text=The%20law%20states%20that%20%5BRCW%2074.34,
For more on mandatory reporting of child abuse/neglect: 
https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/mandated-reporter
Focus group facilitator’s role:

• Create a supportive environment
• Ask focused questions, explore comments that aren’t fully explained
• Encourage discussion
• Encourage expression of differing viewpoints
• Refrain from offering your opinion, judgement, or experiences
  • This includes body language
• Keep track of time
• Maintain focus on topic & minimize trailing off topic

A good facilitator is critical to getting accurate information. It can be hard not to affirm participants’ views or share our own, especially if we agree! And it is important for facilitators to be neutral. The facilitator is key for keeping data collection on track.

Tips for encouraging discussion

• Clarifying confusion about a question
• Look for meaning, don’t be afraid to ask participants to elaborate
• Probe for clarification and more information
  • Waiting (allowing silence, for people to respond)
  • Asking: “Can you tell me more about that.” or “What makes you say that?”
  • Rephrasing / summarizing back: “I’m hearing you say...” “It sounds like you’re saying...” “Let me see if I have this right... you’re saying...”
• Including others by asking, “Does anyone else feel that way? Has that been anyone else’s experience? Anyone have a different experience or see that differently?”

Silence can be a useful tool – it may feel awkward but don’t be afraid!

Remember prompts for discussion should be neutral and not suggest a direction or type of response.


[https://sk.sagepub.com/books/involving-community-members-in-focus-groups](https://sk.sagepub.com/books/involving-community-members-in-focus-groups)
Incentives are a common way to improve response rates to various types of surveys. They can be useful sometimes, but they are definitely not necessary! How you might use them depends a lot on your context.

In general survey participation should always be optional. It’s ethical to allow respondents to choose whether to participate, and if they do participate only because they feel they have to, it may bias your results. This is especially true for surveys of members or a community or other broad groups of people.

If you are, for example, requiring program participants to fill out an evaluation survey, that’s generally acceptable and you probably don’t need to incentivize them.
Analyzing qualitative data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Thematic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reflect what respondents said, issues raised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify key ideas/content in data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can also look at relationships between content</td>
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Process evaluations are handy for understanding what happened, how things worked or work.

One can conduct an outcome or impact study to see if a program or strategy had an impact on outcomes as expected. And if there is no impact, how do you know if it is because the intervention was not implemented as designed, or the intervention is not working for this community, if at all?

A process evaluation should help you understand whether the program or strategy was working as planned.

These differ from continuous quality assurance efforts, or improvement efforts.

Where can performance measures fall, do any of these make good use of performance goals measured over time?
Approaches to analyses

• Cut and paste method
• Open coding with highlighting
• Running code list
• Developing a coding scheme for thematic analyses

Methods for coding qualitative data range in complexity. The cut and paste method involves printing two copies of a focus group (or other method) transcript, and cutting one copy up to sort comments/answers by similarity (e.g. into buckets). The open coding and running code lists involve coding as you go, and coding all responses into categories so you can describe what resulted from data collection. Thematic analyses involves developing codes ahead of time and applying them systematically. Entire books have been written on thematic coding – the most common approach is likely grounded theory (see for example http://www.qualres.org/HomeGrou-3589.html).
Finding themes in narrative

• Read one of the following scenarios (if breakout room is even number, read Morgan’s. If breakout room is odd, read Anne’s).
• Take 3-4 minutes as an individual to find one theme or key point that stands out for you.
• In groups of 3-4, discuss what your key point was – as a group, identify 1-2 key points to share back with our large group (5-6 minutes).
• Take 3-4 minutes to talk about what was easy and hard about this task, what you noticed about finding themes.
• Identify one person to share key points in chat box and/or be willing to share reflections with our large group.

The purpose of this exercise to is to introduce you to the work of identifying themes in narrative.
Morgan, 18 years old

I really wasn’t paying attention at all—I didn’t really care [about the virus]. Trump told us it was never going to hit the United States. He said there were like three cases. I thought I definitely wouldn’t get it—if there are just a handful of cases, why would I be one? I work at a car dealership, and my GM got back from a seven-country tour, and four or five days after he got back I had a sore throat. Our receptionist got a horrible cough too. She just stopped coming to work. Last Monday, I got to my desk and just started hacking up a lung. My GM came in and said, “Clorox wipe your office and go home.” I woke up the next day and felt like trash. I felt I had inhaled glue. My throat was sticky. I was coughing. Lots of migraines. Horrible migraines. It just went from feeling great to taking a five-hour nap in the afternoon. There was dizziness and confusion. Sometimes I feel fine, then the coughing up a lung came back. There were a couple of times I’ll just be sitting on the floor hitting my inhaler.

I called my doctor, and they said, “Do you know three people who have it?” No. “Have you been to China, Europe, or these places?” No. OK, just try to get better at home. Then I was seeing the news tags on Facebook; I saw the news that there were now hundreds of cases. After I found out I couldn’t be tested, I was thinking, “Who else can’t be tested? I’m really sick and no one’s being tested.” When I cook, I don’t smell anything while I’m cooking. I can smell really pungent scents—like taking out the trash—but nothing sweet. My work and my boyfriend’s work require a positive test for us to be paid while we’re quarantined, but they don’t seem to understand that we literally will not be tested. I’ve had multiple episodes where I’ve been stuck laying on the floor, struggling to breath, head pounding, and sweating like I just ran a marathon, but I can’t afford a $30,000 hospital bill to go get an oxygen mask and still no test.
Anne, 35 years old

I tested positive for Covid-19 [last week]. I'm relatively fine; lucky, even. Around here, officials have been preparing, so much so that I was able to get a test when I needed it. Facebook sent us home many days ago, so it’s unlikely I affected a big group of colleagues. I went supply shopping weeks ago. Here’s what I didn’t prepare for: telling my kids to back away from me, while informing them that this scary thing upending the entire planet is now inside our house. Inside their mom. My daughter cried and asked if I will get better. I couldn’t hug her. My son wrote an account of it for our home newspaper. “Anne has the coronavirus but do not worry it is not the bad kind,” he wrote on the front page. “Please note that you should not be within 10 feet of Anne.”

Even when I got sick, I assumed I didn’t have it. After reading so many coronavirus stories as part of my job for weeks now, I thought I knew what to look for: a dry cough, a slow onset, a high fever. I had none of those things. Instead it hit me suddenly, with chills, aches, a mild fever, a sore throat, and a terrible headache, and then improved dramatically within three days. Now I’m just extremely tired, and because of a history of pneumonia, trying to force myself to sleep. The health department called to inform me to stay away from everyone, including my children. So who should take care of them if my husband tests positive, too? “We haven’t had that scenario yet,” the public health nurse said, offering to call me back.

Last Friday, [my husband] Jon’s doctor called to say he had it, too. The medical advice, already unclear, got more confusing. If both Jon and I have the coronavirus, should we test our two kids? No, the doctors said. You should assume your kids have it, or already did. So does that mean we can all hold each other, and be together in the same rooms? Can I take off my mask and gloves? No, the doctors said. You don’t want to give them more virus—more “viral load”—and make them or both of you even sicker. And absolutely no one can come or go from the house.
Finding themes in narrative

• What themes did you identify?
• What was easy and hard about this task?
• What did you notice about the process?

It can be extremely useful to use peers to check coding and interpretation.
Things to remember during analyses

- Work from evaluation questions
- Methods and findings should be understandable to audience
- All data and findings should be scrubbed to protect individual identity
- Check yourself along the way against raw data
- Share findings with others, subject matter experts and community members, those impacted, to check interpretation and understand context
- Be transparent about limitations
Findings can be actionable and support equity.

Advocate for new or expanded services

Target and eliminate identified barriers

Make programs more appropriate and acceptable

Improve service delivery

The goal is to know what you want to know, and then design a study and method that rewards you with actionable findings.

Evaluation questions can inform resource and service delivery decisions, identify barriers and potential solutions, identify program improvements, access and equity concerns to address.

Examples of actionable results from a BSK project include -

• Hearing students benefit from counseling but would like more than 2 visits a quarter
• Hiring bilingual caseworkers for home visits
• Maybe times of a class don’t work, or bus lines don’t run during those times
• Parental consent, being clear about privacy, flag in the office, training staff on use of preferred pronouns and LGBTQ healthcare
• A motivator to attend a required class might be childcare
Example Questions and Methods

- For example focus group protocol and questions, please see page 19 of a recent report on youth and gun violence
- A UNICEF COVID-19 focus group guide
- National Institute of Health COVID-19 Survey Questions and other tools

Here are links to some recommended resources that may be helpful.
Tips for coding data
Coding responses

1. Familiarize yourself with the data
   a) Record thoughts and process for transparency
   b) Keep data organized
2. Generate initial codes
   a) Use a coding framework (develop with peers and review of past related work/knowledge)
   b) Document code generation, peer meetings
3. Search for themes - Analyses within and across cases allows you to look at how many people mentioned the same themes (all, some, a few), and look more easily at what common and related themes exist
4. Review themes
   a) Discuss with peers/coders
   b) Test for accuracy by going back to raw data
5. Define and name themes
6. Coding that involves training, support and reliability testing and checks result in consistent, accurate findings (especially when multiple people are coding)

You want to document the process to ensure dependability, consistency and accurate interpretation. Checking yourself and group against raw data will help, using coding or analyses team or peer group to check judgement will help.

How many codes?

- Your evaluation questions inform this decision.
- No magic or standardized number exists.
- Final number of themes/concepts should be minimized to keep analysis coherent, meaningful.
- Advice exists
  - Lichtman (2006) – Generate 80-100 codes that will be organized into 15-20 categories which eventually synthesize into five to seven (5-7) major concepts.
  - Creswell (2007) – Begin with a short-list of five to six provisional codes to begin the process of “lean coding”. This expands to no more than 25-30 categories that then combine into five to six (5-6) major themes.
  - Wolcott (1994) – 3 of anything major is a good quantity for reporting qualitative work.

References:

Here are links to some recommended resources that may be helpful.

Resources

- Designing and Conducting Focus Groups by R Krueger: [https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf](https://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf)
- Community Tool Box:
- Youth Development Executives of King County’s Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data Presentation: [https://ydekc.org/resource-center/analyzing-qualitative-data/](https://ydekc.org/resource-center/analyzing-qualitative-data/)
- Moderating a focus group: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjHZsEcSqwo&feature=emb_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjHZsEcSqwo&feature=emb_logo)
How do we request assistance, or ask questions about data and evaluation?

Free Data Consultation and Technical Assistance
Email: Communitiescount@kingcounty.gov

See more data and trainings, visit us at:
www.communitiescount.org