

Do's and Don'ts of Qualitative Data Collection

4 June 2025



Interviews & Focus Groups

Addressing Intimidation



Don't

- Be intimidated to collect qualitative data

Do

- Take it one step at a time – You can do it!

Why?

- You are collecting qualitative data anytime someone tells you verbally what they think about your program – now we're just making it a bit more formal

Intentionality



Don't

- Go into the interview/group without a clear set of goals

Do

- Create questions/goals specific to the interview/group

Why?

- Help avoid the issue of asking everything under the sun, just because you've got a group convened.
- Ensure that everything you ask is intentional and directly related to/supportive of your reasoning for convening the group.

Example

Enlace Family Program Focus Group Protocol

Location: Enlace Comunitario

Date: Tuesday, January 16th from 4:00-5:30 pm

Evaluation Goals:

1. Is the Enlace Comunitario Family Program (FP) repairing family bonds?
2. Does family participation in the FP help develop resiliency and self-regulation in children? In the non-violent parent?
3. Is the FP helping to break the cycle of intergenerational domestic violence?

3:30 pm **Arrive, prep room by setting up the flip charts, easels, and setting out paper, markers, tape, flash cards, etc.**

4:00 pm As people are coming in, introduce ourselves individually and have them start with Activity 1 (while mingling and getting food) Name Cards – Write your name and 3 words to describe yourself.

Facilitation



Don't

- Assume you can't facilitate with your own clients/participants

Do

- Remember to remind participants that their honest feedback helps improve the program
- Remind participants that ALL feedback is welcome

Why?

- Your participants know and trust you
- If they know THEY are not the subject of the evaluation, they will (hopefully) be more comfortable sharing honestly.

Engagement



Don't

- Plan a group where participants just sit around the table and talk

Do

- Plan a group that allows participants to engage in various ways (through talking, writing, and drawing)

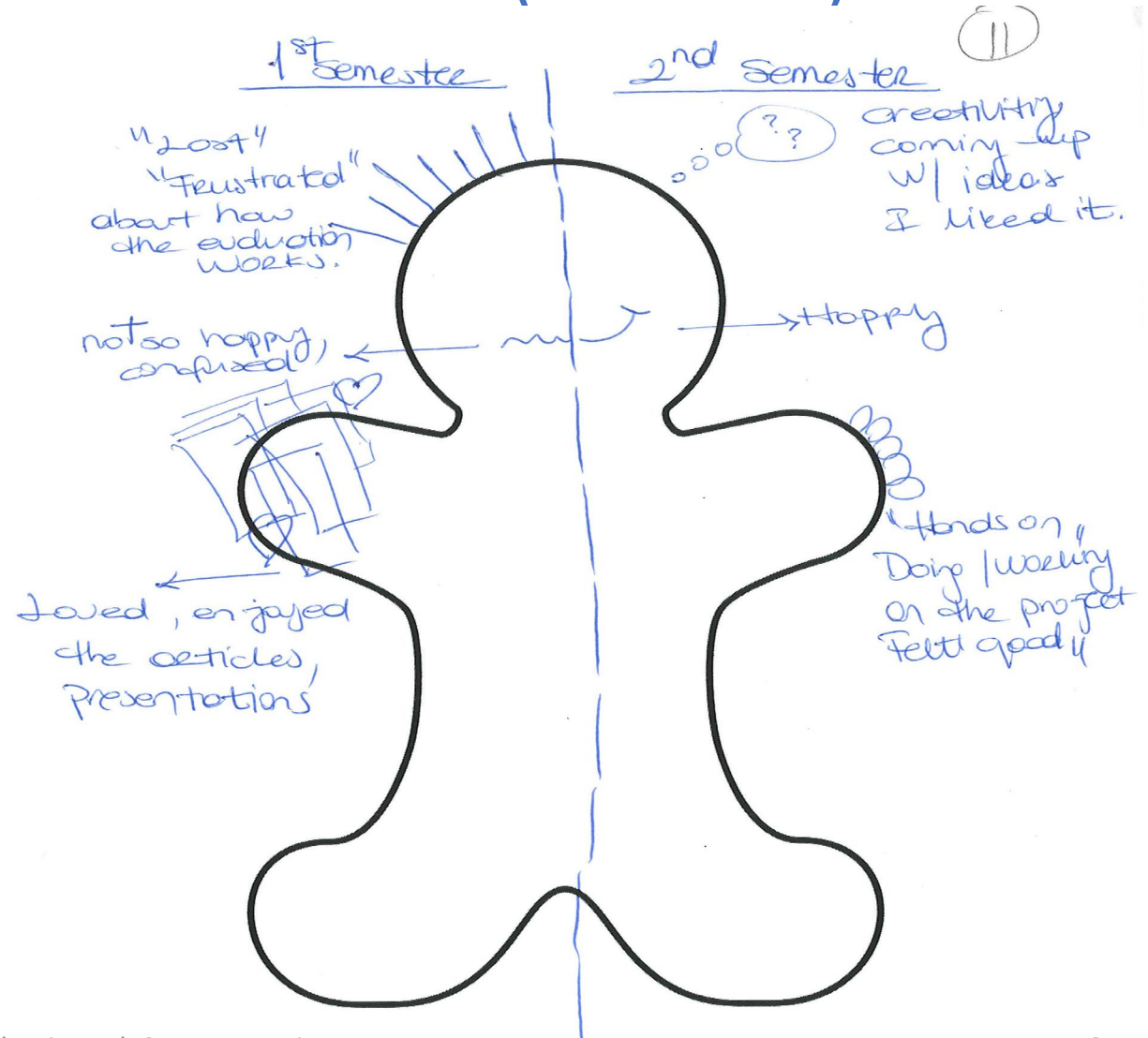
Why?

- Help avoid the issue of hearing only from the most outspoken participants.
- Speed up transcription time
- They're FUN! And you end up with cool images to share in your reports!

Evaluation of the Evaluation Lab (Eval^2)

One of the questions: What did the course feel like for students?

Activity: Draw what you **felt** like in the course on this gingerbread person.



Activities



Don't

- Resort to just one activity

Do

- Incorporate up to 5 different types of activities to engage participants

Why?

- Ensure participants have a variety of ways to communicate their responses.
- Allows everyone to participate in the way they're most comfortable.



Possible Activities

Gingerbread Person – individual or group

- Express sentiments about something (feeling)

Speed Dating – pairs

- Short questions
- Answer with a partner (more private)

Group Lists – groups of no more than 5 (usually)

- Less private, but gives opportunity to brainstorm

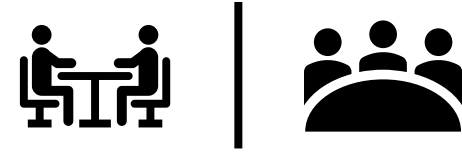
Individual Answers – individual

- Entirely private
- Opportunity to share freely
- Can be drawn, listed, paragraph, bullets, etc.

Plus and Delta – big group, individual, smaller groups

- Gives participants a chance to voice thoughts about program in question

Creating Questions



Don't

- Overload your script/protocol
- Use yes/no questions

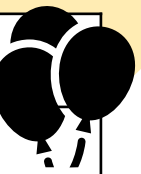
Do

- Limit yourself to **5 questions/activities**
- Use questions that will encourage discussion

Why?

- It's easy to get carried away and want to ask everything
- Time goes very quickly, it's better to select a few questions that you can spend ample time on rather than pack the script and not have time for discussion

Goal: Host a birthday party for a dear friend/family member.



Resources What you need	Activities What you do	Outputs Evidence that you did activities	Outcomes How your program affects participants	
			Short-Term (at end of party)	Long-Term (in the future)
Host Birthday Person Venue/space Food & cake Tables & chairs Decorations Games Funding Music Piñata & candy	Eating Singing "happy birthday" and cutting the cake Opening gifts Beating the Piñata Dancing Playing games	# of guests who attend # of gifts (maybe) # of games available to guests % of food and cake eaten vs. left-over Engagement: # of people dancing, playing games Enthusiasm Atmosphere Welcoming Comfortable	The birthday person feels special & happy Attendees have a good time	The birthday person has a positive memory of your party The party makes a positive impact on guests – people use your party for ideas for their own parties
Assumptions: Culture – it's culturally appropriate to celebrate the way you've planned The birthday person WANTS to be celebrated (and celebrated in the way you've planned/organized) The resources you have and activities you've planned meet the preferences and needs of the guests			External Factors: COVID Food allergies/restrictions Maybe the day you've chosen is popular and there are several other events happening – guests will have to choose between your event and others Funding/space limitations or availability	

Brainstorm what we might want to know

- The birthday person feels special & happy
- Attendees have a good time
- The birthday person has a positive memory of your party
- The party makes a positive impact on guests – people use your party for ideas for their own parties
- Atmosphere (Welcoming & Comfortable)

Example Questions - Interview



Brainstorm - everything we want to know

- The birthday person feels special & happy
- Attendees have a good time
- The birthday person has a positive memory of your party
- The party makes a positive impact on guests – people use your party for ideas for their own parties
- Atmosphere (Welcoming & Comfortable)

Questions – Interview

- Can you share an example of something at/from the party that made you feel special and/or happy?
- Think back to your party. How would you describe it?
 - Follow-up: What activities were happening that you enjoyed?
 - Follow-up: Were there activities that you did not enjoy?
- Is there something about the party you'd like to share that I haven't addressed in these questions?

Example Questions - Focus Group



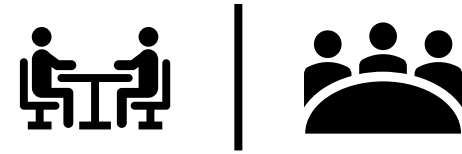
Brainstorm - everything we want to know

- The birthday person feels special & happy
- Attendees have a good time
- The birthday person has a positive memory of your party
- The party makes a positive impact on guests – people use your party for ideas for their own parties
- Atmosphere (Welcoming & Comfortable)

Questions – Focus Group

- Think back to the party. How would you describe it?
- What activities were happening that you enjoyed?
- Were there activities that you did not enjoy? Can you elaborate?
- Were there ideas or activities from the party you'd like to use at your own parties? If so, which ones?
- Is there something about the party you'd like to share that I haven't addressed in these questions?

Planning Ahead



Don't

- Forget to outline a timeframe
- Forget your materials

Do

- Sketch out a timeframe
- List out what kinds of materials needed

Why?

- Without a sketch of the timeframe, it can be easy to get “stuck” in questions or activities.
- Without a list of materials, it's hard to remember what you'll need for the interview/group.

Timeframe



- Strongly based in how long you have for the interview/group
- For focus group, actual time in each activity should allow for movement, explanation, questions
- **For example, an hour-long focus group → 45 minutes on activities and 15 for explanation and for overlap.**
 - **Introduction/Icebreaker** – 5 minutes
 - **Speed Answer Round** – 10 minutes
 - **Individual Answers** – 15 minutes
 - **Plus and Delta** – 15 minutes

Recording



Don't

- Assume recording will happen

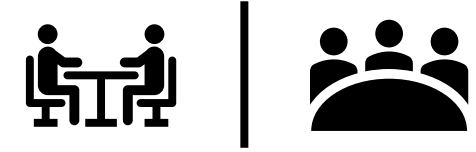
Do

- Ask permission to record, respect response
- Plan to take notes
- Debrief immediately following

Why?

- Recorder/phone could stop recording/die
- Participant(s) may not be comfortable with recording

If you go **virtual**...



Don't

- Assume the same amount of time as in-person

Do

- Allow **extra time** to get people on the same page with the digital tools you are using

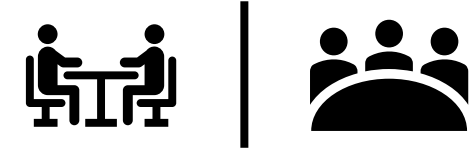
Why?

Your materials will look more like – Jamboard, polls, chatbox, etc.

Everything takes LONGER

Not everyone knows how to use jamboard, zoom, etc. – have to factor this in and either make the group longer, make fewer activities, have other ways for folks to participate

After the Interview/Group



Don't

- Assume that's all there is to it

Do

- Debrief: Ask yourself, **how did it go?** What could have been **better?** What should I write down now so I don't forget?
- Review data: try to highlight the diversity of **ideas** and the **common themes**.
- For groups: Take pictures of everything posted on the walls or on easels so you can type into excel or word.
 - For virtual groups, be sure to **save all digital pieces** (jamboards, etc.)

Your turn!

- Pick a data collection tool (survey, interview, focus group)
- Complete Your Evaluation Plan #6
- Brainstorm what you would want to learn from your participants – remember to think about what this group of people can tell you. What knowledge do they possess that you could learn the most from?
 - From that brainstorm, pick a few areas to focus on and create **no more than 5 questions** that you could ask participants.
 - Align those questions with a timeframe and with a possible activity (if doing a focus group).