

Choosing the Right Data Collection Methods

October 20, 2026

ECHO Learning Session



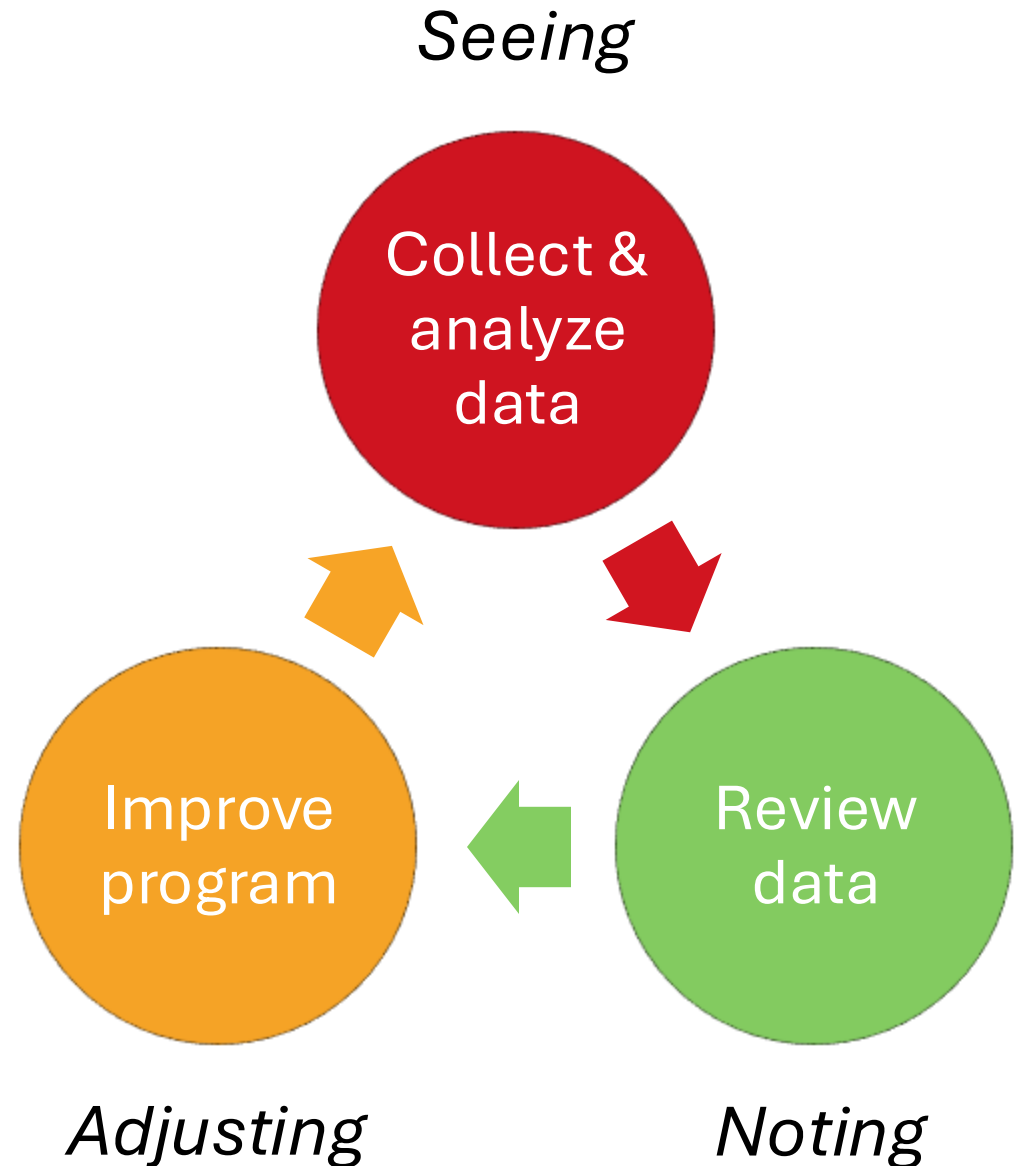
Today:

- Understand the difference between qualitative and quantitative data and the value of each
- Identify who has the best information to answer each evaluation question
- Choose the most effective way to collect this information

What is data?

Data =

What you sense, feel, know
Attributes, observable or not
Admin records
Emails, letters, and journals



Quantitative and Qualitative Data **Guidelines**

Use quant if...

- The answer to your evaluation question is:
 - yes/no, a score on an assessment or rubric? (yes or no, to what degree? how much?)
- You want to collect from everyone (or from a representative sample)
- Relatively easy to collect and analyze
- You can only measure what you ask

Use qual if...

- The answer to your evaluation question requires an explanation
- (why?), process (how?) or experience (what)? Do you need examples and stories?
- You want to collect from different "subject positions"
- Time consuming to analyze
- Provides depth

TWO KINDS OF ANSWERS

The question decides the method

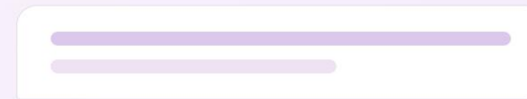


QUANTITATIVE

How many

How much

How often



QUALITATIVE

Why

How

What we missed

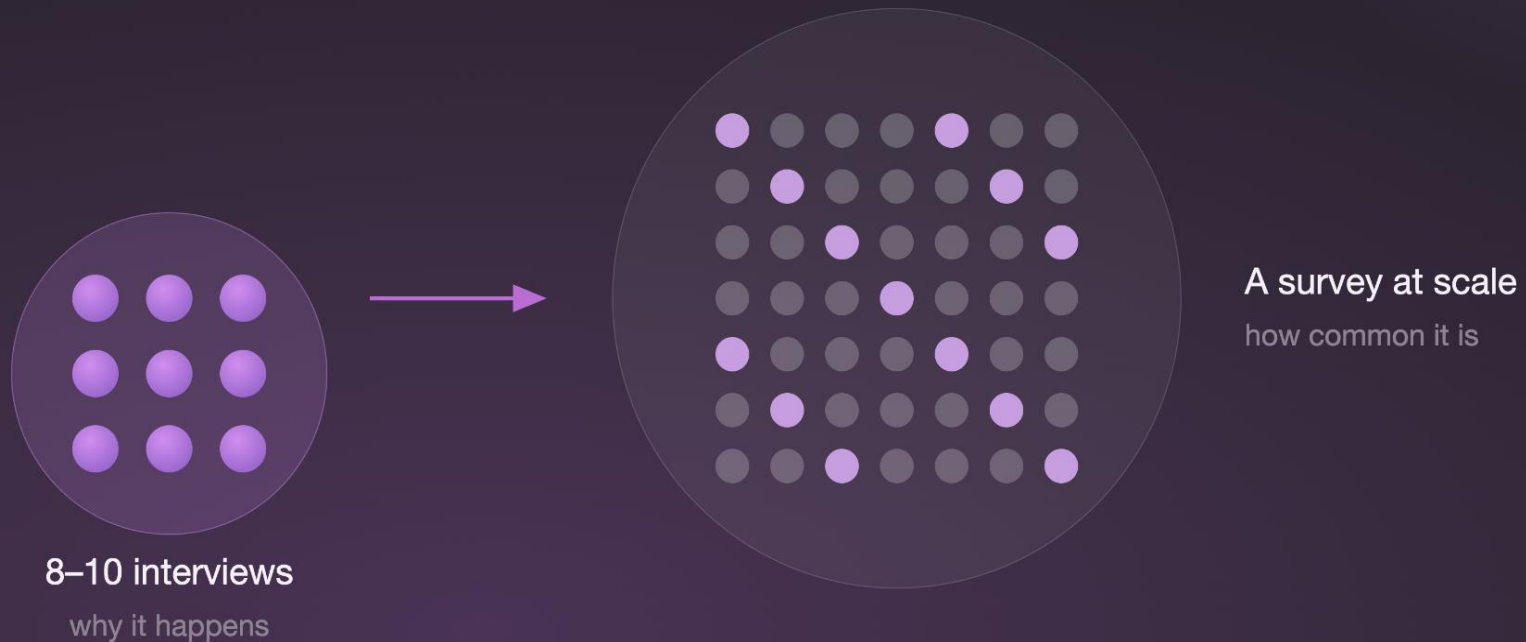
Using quantitative and qualitative data together

- Quantitative outcomes make more sense when we understand the how and why that qualitative data provides
- Great qualitative outcomes are more believable when the quantitative data supports them
- You can use one to inform or elaborate the other
- Using both is a good long-term strategy to evaluation

Tip: Ok to just use one if you are just getting started!

MIXED METHODS

A few voices first, then the crowd



Data collection methods

- **Surveys:** individual responses to written questions
 - Choice among pre-determined answers
 - Open-ended responses
- **Focus groups:** participant interacts with others in conversations and other open-ended data collection activities
- **Interviews:** one-on-one guided conversation
- **Letters, reflections, drawings:** individual self-expression
- **Administrative tracking:**
 - Demographics Outputs: attendance, total time in program, completion
 - Outcomes: housing, employment, graduation, college enrollment, knowledge and skills
- **Assessments and tests:**
 - Outcomes: skills, knowledge, behavior
- **Student portfolio:**
 - Outputs: projects
 - Outcomes: knowledge and skills

Questions to ask yourself before choosing

1. **What kind of answer do I need?** Use quantitative data collection for “how many” questions and qualitative data collection for deeper “why” questions.
2. **How many people do I need to hear from?** Broader comparisons often point toward surveys, while depth may favor interviews or observation.
3. **What are the budget and timeline?** Interviews take more hands-on work. Secondary data may answer the question faster.
4. **How sensitive is the topic?** Consider whether people will answer more openly in a self-administered format or a private conversation.
5. **Can I reach the right people?** Easy access is not enough if the sample misses the population behind the decision.

BEFORE YOU PICK A METHOD

Five things to weigh



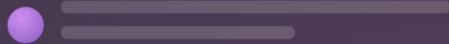
Numbers or words



How many people



Budget and time



Sensitive topics



Access to them

Then pick
the method

Things to avoid

- Choosing the method before defining the question
- Writing leading or double-barreled questions
- Sampling only easy-to-reach participants
- Collecting information nobody plans to analyze
- Planning analysis after collection begins
- Treating a large sample as a cure for biased sampling
- Requesting sensitive information without a clear reason

Key Takeaways

- Primary data is collected for the current question. Secondary data already exists.
- Quantitative data answers “how many?” Qualitative data collection explains “why?”
- Choosing a familiar method before defining the research question can produce precise answers to the wrong problem.
- Combining methods can reveal a pattern and explain what is driving it.
- Every method gives something up. Faster collection may mean less depth, while wider reach may come with less control over data quality.

Resources

- Typeform has PowerPoints and articles on product testing surveys, building surveys, creating quizzes, data collection methods
 - https://www.typeform.com/blog?_gl=1*m9wurj*_up*MQ..*_gs*MQ..&gclid=CjwKCAjwotzWBhBFEiwA1JhPoPcyE0ub5eVX7TAI94EpGp-ObfXRtipLBmlmTI5B06_E2E5gEXdbWBoCGRUQAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds&gbraid=0AAAAADLdz03wTae2zGteWjSxKrkkRFUO7&tf_campaign=US_CA-Generic-Research-English-Desktop_23915750398&tf_source=google&tf_medium=paid&tf_content=200849536756_826837984719&tf_term=research+tools
- Pew Research Center has articles and tools to help write your survey questions
 - <https://www.pewresearch.org/writing-survey-questions/>
- ECHO Learning Community website has several older PowerPoint presentations that provide information about data collection, methods, and more evaluation-related resources
 - <https://evallab.unm.edu/for-organizations/learning-center/evaluation-lab-project-echo-learning-community-.html>

Resources shared from the chat

- <https://superset.apache.org/>
- <https://www.tableau.com/>
- <https://project-redcap.org/>
- <https://delawarenonprofit.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/The-Social-Profit-Handbook-summary.pdf>
- <https://effectiveness.syr.edu/assessment/assessment-resources/rubric-library/examples-of-rubrics/>
- https://canvas.unl.edu/courses/38129/pages/using-rubrics?module_item_id=779256
- <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/northeast/onlinetraining/ResourcesTools/Guidance%20on%20Creating%20Rubrics.pdf>

Thank you!

Questions?

