

While conducting an outreach project, you will need to make several decisions. As you monitor project activities, you will need to decide whether to make changes to your plans. As the project nears its end, you will decide how to report the results. You and others invested in the project, referred to as stakeholders, will have to decide if your outreach project should be continued. If you are going to make good decisions about your outreach project, you need information or *data*. In this booklet we use the word “data” to include numbers, facts, and written descriptions of comments gathered through counting, surveying, observing, interviewing, or other investigations.

During community and pre-project assessment, data can help you identify groups in your community that are in particular need of health information outreach. Data also can be used to assess the resources and challenges facing your project. While you are implementing your activities and strategies, data can provide you with feedback for project improvement — this is called process assessment. During outcomes assessment, data can provide the basis for you and other stakeholders to identify and understand results and to determine if your project has accomplished its goals.

Therefore, much care must go into the design of your data collection methods to assure accurate, credible and *useful* information. To really understand and assess an outreach project, multiple and mixed methods are required:

- “Multiple methods” means collecting data from more than one source and not relying on one survey or test or focus group to provide an adequate program assessment.

- “Mixed methods” means that a variety of types of information sources are used to assess your project.

Good evaluation usually combines both *quantitative* and *qualitative* methods. Quantitative methods gather numerical data that can be summarized through statistical procedures. Qualitative methods collect non-numerical data, usually textual, that can provide rich details about your project. Each approach has its particular strengths and, when used together, can provide a thorough picture of your project.

This booklet is organized into two sections: one for quantitative methods and one for qualitative methods. After a brief overview, each section focuses on a specific method that is common and applicable to a variety of evaluation projects. In the quantitative section, the survey method has been chosen. For the qualitative section, interviewing is the method addressed.

However, we should note that neither surveys or interviews are limited to collecting one type of data. Either method can be designed to collect qualitative or quantitative data and, often, they are designed to collect a combination of both.

You pick the type of method based on the evaluation question you want to answer. Figure 1 is designed to help you make a decision about the type of method to use.

Figure 1: Choosing Type of Method

