Tracking

Description:

Recording of factual data.

Example:

Counting of events, participants, or contacts with users

Observation

Description:

Collecting information through "seeing" and "listening"

Example:

Watching how children interact with adult volunteers

Survey

Description:

Using structured questions to gather data from many people

Example:

Using an online survey to learn if food pantry users are satisfied

Interview

Description:

Information collected by talking with and listening to people

Example:

Asking the manager at a grocery store about their job and store

Creative

Description:

Use of art forms to represent people's ideas and feelings

Example:

Asking children to draw a picture of what they learned

Ripple Map

Description:

Creating a visual "map" of various ideas and how they are connected

Example:

Drawing the connections between people involved in a single project

Survey

When to Use this Method

When you need to quickly and easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way

Advantages

Anonymous, cheap, easy to analyze

Challenges

Impersonal, sometimes careless feedback, wording can cause bias

Observation

When to Use this Method

To gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, esp. about processes

Advantages

View what's actually happening

Challenges

Can be hard to be unbiased, complex analysis

Tracking

When to Use this Method

When you simply need an answer to "how many?" or "how often?"

Advantages

Simple, inexpensive, easy to analyze

Challenges

Very limited data, does not reveal effectiveness or real impact

Ripple Map

When to Use this Method

When you want to understand the relationships between things

Advantages

Visual, inexpensive, based on available data

Challenges

Challenging to capture all data and represent it visually

Creative

When to Use this Method

When circumstances make it challenging to collect written or verbal data (i.e. with children)

Advantages

Creative, flexible, shareable

Challenges

Can be challenging to interpret and analyze

Interview

When to Use this Method

To understand the experience of individuals in some depth

Advantages

Can collect deeper responses, rich data, recording possible

Challenges

Time consuming, input from fewer people, complex analysis