

# What is program evaluation?

A beginners guide

## What is evaluation

This is the third in a set of handouts on the key questions about program evaluation.

This handout is about: What methods to use.

There are many methods, each with their own uses, advantages and difficulties.

Evaluations could use any, not necessarily all, of the various methods, depending on the question and goal of the evaluation.

This handout lists various methods, each of which are described in more detail in the following handouts.

QUALITATIVE<----->QUANTITATIVE						
Participant Observation	Interviews (open)	Focus Groups	Interviews Semi-structured	Document Review	Observation (with score check list)	Surveys

This table and the next one are developed from:  
Program Evaluation: Background and Methods  
Evaluation Methodology  
[http://ed.fnal.gov/trc\\_new/program\\_docs/eval\\_meth.html](http://ed.fnal.gov/trc_new/program_docs/eval_meth.html)

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Free Resources for Methods in Program Evaluation  
<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods>

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Qualitative	Quantitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tells how, why</li> <li>• Open-ended</li> <li>• Reseacher as instrument</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tells what and how much</li> <li>• Closed format</li> <li>• Instrumentation protocols, formats</li> </ul>
<b>Benefits ("rich data"):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptions, narration</li> <li>• Understandings</li> <li>• Perceptions/perspectives</li> </ul>	<b>Benefits (numerical, measurement):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information from a large sample size</li> <li>• Information cheaper to collect</li> <li>• More objective</li> </ul>
<b>Drawbacks:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information from a small sample size</li> <li>• Information expensive to collect - labor intensive</li> <li>• More subjective</li> </ul>	<b>Drawbacks:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May miss important data - such as perceptions, values and unintended outcomes</li> </ul>

### Additional Resource

Overview of Data Collection Techniques  
 Designing and Conducting Health Systems Research Projects  
 International Development Research Center  
[http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-56606-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-56606-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)

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I also benefited greatly from feedback from folks on various email lists, and I thank them all!

**The most recent version of this handout is always at**  
<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/>