Information Gathering Methods for Engaging the Community and Gathering Feedback

Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages/Limitations	Considerations
Interview	In-depth informal or formal one-on-one conversations where individuals can share their experiences, opinions, and feedback. Can be done with key community leaders or individuals representing specific populations.	• In-depth information gathered directly from source • Allows for follow-up questions to validate/enhance understanding or explore additional areas not originally intended • Good for exploring individual perspectives • Usable for broad variety of topics • Individuals may be more comfortable sharing one-on-one, especially for sensitive topics • May identify new partners, champions, leaders, and advocates	• Training interviewers, conducting interviews, transcribing, and analyzing data can be expensive and time-consuming • Data analysis can be complex, and results may not be generalizable • Interviewer can bias responses • Individuals may not feel comfortable being interviewed	• Requires a trained interviewer • Partners can be involved as interviewers • Consider how results will be shared back with participants
Survey/Questionnaire	List of questions (quantitative and/or qualitative) answered by individuals. Can be administered in written, phone, online, or in-person formats. A traditional approach to gathering community input.	• Useful for reaching large numbers of people • Can be completed anonymously • Easy to administer	• Low response rates, especially for certain populations, may be an issue • May not generate careful responses • Not suitable for collecting in-depth information	• Data should be supported and supplemented by more interactive approach(es). Survey should not be only information-gathering method • Consider using incentives

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		• Easy to compare and analyze data • Can track trends over time	• Impersonal, not interactive • Requires careful writing of questions and sampling • Subject to various types of error including coverage, sampling, non-response, and measurement • Cost	• Consider pre-survey publicity and communications • Consider how results will be shared back with participants
Focus Group	A small group of participants (~8-10) led by a trained facilitator offer insights, ideas, and observations based on a series of questions. Useful for collecting information from priority populations.	• In-depth information gathered directly from source • Group dynamics can encourage rich discussion • Good group formation can result in information from multiple perspectives • Faster way to hear from multiple people than individual interviews • Allows for follow-up questions to validate/enhance understanding or explore additional areas not originally intended • Can be an efficient way to get breadth and depth of information • May identify new partners, champions, leaders, and advocates	• Training facilitators and note-takers, conducting sessions, transcribing, and analyzing data can be expensive and time-consuming • Capturing and interpreting data may be challenging • Group dynamics may hinder honest sharing; highly personal or sensitive topics may not be suitable for focus groups • Individuals may dominate discussion or not be comfortable sharing in group setting • Results are highly dependent on expertise of moderator and may not be generalizable • Only a small number of people can realistically participate	• Requires a trained facilitator and note taker • Requires significant preparation • Consider how people are grouped to ensure comfort • Consider using incentives • Consider how results will be shared back with participants
Community Forum/Listening Session	A broad, inclusive public meeting where community members can share their ideas, opinions, and concerns. The goal is typically to understand how community members perceive the	• Can reach many people and gather lots of information in short period of time • Helps raise awareness of topic	• Can create mistrust or harm if poorly planned/executed • Certain individuals/groups may dominate discussion	• Requires a facilitator and promotion of the event • Discussions can be incorporated into the

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	opportunities and challenges of a topic.	• May identify new partners, champions, leaders, and advocates • Involves community in planning/decision-making process • Relatively low cost	• Requires effective promotion to achieve broad community involvement • Planning an ideal location and time to meet community needs can be difficult	agendas of existing town meetings • Consider how results will be shared back with participants
Photovoice	An audio and photographic view of the community by community members.	• Allows community to directly collect data they choose and that supports their own views or experiences • Can be shown to others • Can be empowering for participants and promote reflective thinking • May identify new partners, champions, leaders, and advocates • Especially attractive to youth	• Can be resource and time intensive • Viewers may misinterpret images • Images may not fully or accurately represent a situation • Not all assets or issues can be photographed	• There should be agreement about with whom the project will be shared and for what purpose • Permission should be given by any individuals depicted in the photovoice • Observations may be influenced by time of day/week/year
Windshield and Walking Surveys	Observations completed by driving or walking in the community with a focus on identifying assets (e.g., clinics, recreation sites, housing quality) or unrecognized issues (e.g., potholes, litter, noise).	• Easy to conduct and inexpensive • Allows community to directly collect data they choose and that supports their own views or experiences • Can bring new awareness of community assets or issues • Useful for gathering information on specific condition(s) or aspect(s) of a community, especially the physical, social, and economic characteristics	• Results based on one individual's (or a few) observations • Observer(s) may not be familiar with environment and therefore may not know what to look for or may misinterpret something • Limited by access and geographic area explored • Potential for high variability in the data • Windshield surveys not suitable for examining things	• Windshield survey participants should go in teams to allow for a driver and at least one person taking notes • Consider how results will be shared back with participants • Can involve partners as observers • Observations may be influenced by time of day/week/year

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			• difficult to see from a moving car • Walking surveys not accessible to all and can be tiring for surveyors	
Existing Data Review	Review of existing internal or external data from sources such as government agencies, organizations, or researchers (records, data sets, reports, social media posts, etc.).	• Non-intrusive • Avoids over-sampling populations and unnecessary expenditures on redundant data collection • May provide longitudinal data for identifying trends over time • May allow for identification of relevant past (or current) projects	• May not include data that meets needs • Data from multiple sources may not be appropriate to aggregate or compare based on methods and quality	• Important to consider data methods, quality, strengths, and weaknesses
Observation	Systematic observation using protocols, checklists, ratings, and field notes. Includes site visits and other methods for gathering information on people and the environment.	• Allows for capture of human interactions and dynamics • Good for gathering contextual information • Can be effective at examining change/consistency over time through multiple observations	• Results based on one individual's (or a few) observations • Observer(s) may not be familiar with environment and therefore may not know what to look for or misinterpret something • Limited by access • People may behave differently when they know they are being observed • Can be time-consuming	• Observations may be influenced by time of day/week/year • Can involve partners as observers

Sources: (MN Public Health Corps, 2022) (National Association of County and City Health Officials, n.d.)