



UCLA CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH
The Health DATA List Serve
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Rapid Assessment Methods: Community Approaches to Data Collection

Increased demand for local data to inform policy initiatives or to evaluate program effectiveness has heightened interest in rapid assessment or appraisal data collection methods. Rapid assessment often uses qualitative methods to collect data in a way that is relatively easy to implement, affordable, and accommodates high community involvement. When rapid assessment is used in combination with quantitative (numerical) data from surveys or statistics, it can illustrate the human impact and meaning of numbers.

Rapid assessment methods can include key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies. Direct observations, maps, and photographs or video documentation are the easiest and quickest rapid assessment methods community groups can use to collect local data:

- **Direct Observation:** Selected community observers record what they see or hear at a program site or surrounding community. Direct observations are useful in evaluating program activities. For example, observations of how a children's nutrition program is implemented can indicate whether the program is reaching its target group.
- **Maps/Diagrams:** Maps or diagrams can define an area being studied and show types of changes that are occurring. This method is useful to identify and illustrate the distribution of resources. For example, as part of a community assessment residents can map health clinics in their neighborhood to show gaps in service and present the data to their local health department to influence policies regarding the allocation of services.
- **Photographs/Video:** Photos or videos can visually document activities, behaviors and neighborhood conditions not fully captured in written reports. For instance, pictures documenting concentrations of manufacturers may reveal damaging environmental effects in a neighborhood.

These methods are advantageous because they can often be quickly completed. However, the data may not be generalizable to situations beyond those being studied and may provide little information about the causes and scope of the problems identified. Nevertheless, rapid assessment data can foster a vivid understanding of a problem in ways numbers alone cannot. As such, rapid assessment methods are useful research techniques for community advocates.

For more information on rapid assessment methods check out this month's Internet Quick Picks.

Health DATA Internet Quick Picks

United States Agency for International Development. (2002). *USAID Evaluation Publications, "CDIE Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Tips"* Retrieved May 15, 2003 from http://www.dec.org/usaaid_eval/#008. Using Rapid Appraisal Methods (CDIE Tips 1996 #5), Using Direct Observation Techniques (CDIE Tips 1996 #4), Conducting a Participatory Evaluation (CDIE Tips 1996 #1)

Zukoski, A. and Luluquisen, M. (2002). Participatory Evaluation: What is it? Why do it? What are the challenges? *Community-Based Public Health Policy & Practice Partnership for the Public's Health*, #5.

University of Wisconsin. (n.d.). *Program Development and Evaluation, Cooperative Extension Publications*. Retrieved May 15, 2003 from <http://cf.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/showpubs.cfm?theid=1606>
Collecting Evaluation Data: An Overview of Sources and Methods (G3658-4, June 1996)
Collecting Evaluation Data: Direct Observation (G3658-5, August 1996)