TIPS FOR QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Organize all your narrative data in one place.

Sometimes you may have narrative data from different interviews done at different times, various observations, or different open-ended questions on a survey questionnaire.

Read through and get to know your data.

Spend time reading through the data and thinking about the data.

Decide whether you will use preset categories or emergent categories.

There is no single correct way to categorize qualitative data, but consider the alternative approaches and pick the way that best suits your purpose and data.

Make the analysis suit the use.

Sometimes it is easy to become so immersed in your data that it is hard to see the forest for the trees. There is so much that is interesting and insightful. You may want to include everything. You may want to share it all. However, remember the end user. Seldom do others want to read pages of “rich” description. What will that user really want to learn from these data? Think about a 3-minute summary of your 90-minute focus group interview.

Interpretation is more than description.

Once you’ve categorized and summarized the data, think about the meaning. Keep the interpretation rooted in the raw data, but move beyond just presenting and summarizing the data. Think about the significance of the findings.

Allow adequate time.

Thoughtful and useful analysis takes time. Allocate time for doing the analysis. Often qualitative data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, so consider the time that is needed during data collection for reading and thinking about your data. Analysis doesn’t just happen at the end.