# ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

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<th>Method</th>
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| Questionnaires, surveys, checklists | when need to quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way | -can complete anonymously  
-easy to compare and analyze  
-administer to many people  
-can get lots of data  
-many sample questionnaires already exist | -might not get careful feedback  
-wording can bias client's responses  
-are impersonal  
-in surveys, may need sampling expert  
-doesn't get full story |
| Interviews              | when want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires | -get full range and depth of information  
-develops relationship with client  
-can be flexible with client | -can take much time  
-can be hard to analyze and compare  
-can be costly  
-interviewer can bias client's responses |
| Documentation review    | when want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc. | -get comprehensive and historical information  
-doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program  
-information already exists  
-few biases about information | -often takes much time  
-info may be incomplete  
-need to be quite clear about what looking for  
-not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists |
| Observation             | to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes | -view operations of a program as they are actually occurring  
-can adapt to events as they occur | -can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors  
-can be complex to categorize observations  
-can influence behaviors of program participants  
-can be expensive |
| Focus groups            | explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing | -quickly and reliably get common impressions  
-can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time  
-can convey key information about programs | -can be hard to analyze responses  
-need good facilitator for safety and closure  
-difficult to schedule 6-8 people together |
| Case studies            | to fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases | -fully depicts client's experience in program input, process, and results  
-powerful means to portray program to outsiders | -usually quite time consuming to collect, organize, and describe  
-represents depth of information, rather than breadth |