**Why and how should I sample for my program evaluation?**

The time and resources required to conduct program evaluations are common concerns for evaluators. For an evaluation to be worthwhile, it must be practical for those who conduct evaluations and those who respond to them. Furthermore, if an evaluation is burdensome, the information gathered is often compromised. Devising a thoughtful sampling strategy is one way to ensure that an evaluation is practical and achievable.

**Sampling** is the process of selecting units (i.e., individuals or groups of participants) from a population of interest. In other words, sampling involves selecting a subset of participants from whom you will seek information, and when or how often you will seek this information from them, rather than including all participants at all times. Depending on the size of your audience, a selection of just 10-20% of participants could be a valuable sample size.

**Probability sampling** is an approach in which all participants have a chance of being selected through some form of random selection. You could ask participants to complete a questionnaire in every 3rd or 5th workshop conducted, as an example of systematic random sampling. As an example of a simple random sample, you could draw names to select participants for a follow-up interview. You could combine approaches for a stratified random sampling by dividing participants into particular groups of interest and then random sampling from those groups. When random sampling is used, you can generally assume that the feedback from your sample is representative of the larger group.

Depending on the intent of your program, you may be especially interested in evaluating the impact for a particular subset of the audience. **Purposive sampling** can be used if you want information from a specific group of participants. For example, if you are particularly interested in whether first-time participants benefit from your program, you could screen these individuals during registration and only seek their participation in your evaluation. However, it is important to keep in mind that when random sampling is not used, as with purposive sampling, results should be understood to apply just to the group that was targeted (e.g., first-time participants) and not representative of the larger group.

Remember, other decisions can help make your evaluation both practical and valuable. You should be clear about what you hope to learn from your evaluation and ensure that the questions you ask align with those intents. Additional questions may be interesting to ask but could make your evaluation more burdensome without adding value. You should also determine what programs are most important to evaluate in relation to current priorities. Likewise, it is important to decide when the best time is to conduct your evaluations; it is often best to assess the knowledge gains of participants after the full program has ended.
THE BASICS OF SAMPLING

- Evaluations must be cost effective and practical for both the participants and evaluators. Sampling techniques are essential to know when designing a study.

**Probability Sampling**

All participants have a chance at being selected to participate in an evaluation and lets you assume your feedback is representative of the whole group.

**Random Sampling**

Selecting participants to statistically represent the whole can be done using various strategies (i.e. from a hat, using computer algorithms, or systemic patterns).

**Purposive Sampling**

Sometimes you want to answer questions about a subset of participants. When this happens you specifically target members of the subset you want to focus on with an understanding that information gained this way will only apply to this specific subset of participants and not the whole group.

**Notes on Sample Size...**

When thinking on how many people should be included in a sample:

- A valuable sample size ranges around 10% - 20%
- A larger sample doesn’t always guarantee better data.

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