Types of Research Projects

## Types of Research Projects

There are different types of research projects and each answer different research questions. At the onset, leaders need to determine what they want to learn.

1 Need/Asset Assessment

Provides information that improves understanding of the needs/assets of an individual, group of people, or community.

Example: Hartford's Northeast Neighborhood Food Survey Report
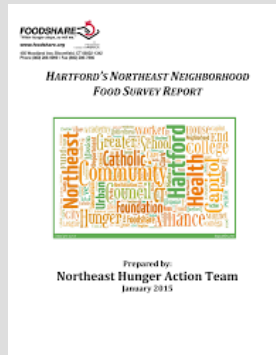
Question: What are the service needs of residents recieving food from Hartford pantries?

Sample: 394 pantry participants

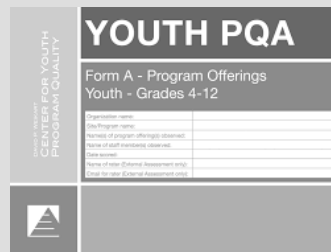**Method**: Self-report, one time

Findings: Resident's level of food insecurity, human service needs of pantry participants

2 Process Evaluation

Provides information that helps program leaders better understand the experiences of people served as well as how programming is delivered.

Example: Youth Program Quality Assessment

Question: To what degree does the program embody key indicators of program quality?

Sample: Program staff and volunteers
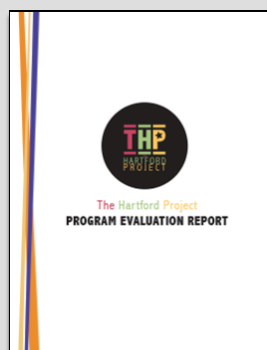
Method: Self-report

Findings: Provides composite scores for five indicators of program quality (e.g. safe environment, healthy interaction) linked to positive outcomes

3 Outcome Evaluation

Provides information that helps stakeholders better understand the impact programming has on participants. It measures changes in attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or life situations.

Example: The Hartford Project Report

Question: What impact does THP have on participating youth?

Sample: 352 youth THP participants

Method: Self-report, pre- and post-surveys

Findings: THP participation improved relationships with youth leaders, increased civic engagement, increased leadership confidence

Research Project Considerations

There are a number of factors to consider when planning a research project including:

- What do you what to learn?
- Who will you collect information from?
- What methods will you use to collect data?
- How will you select questions to ask?
- How will you store and analyze data?
- Who will you share findings with? What strategy will you use?

Sample

Who is able to provide the information you need to answer your research questions?

- Participants in a program
- Members of a group
- Secondary data

Methods

What protocol will be used to collect data? At what time intervals will data be collected?

How will you collect data?	When will you collect data?
In-person interviews	Post-test only
Focus groups	Post-test with retrospective pre-test information
Self-administered surveys	Pre-test and post-test
Internet survey	Comparison or control group

Survey Construction

What questions best answer the research questions?

Existing survey scale: When possible use an existing scale that has proven to be reliable and accurate

Develop you own scale: More detailed information is included in Urban Alliance's handout, "What Makes a Good Survey Question?"

What types of questions provide the data needed?

Dichotomous: only two answers (e.g. yes or no)

Categorical: three or more categorical choices (e.g. ethnicity)

Likert: scales that represent answers (e.g. 1-7 scale, 1 = strongly disagree & 7 = strongly agree)

Open-ended: questions where the respondent provides a narrative response

Analyzing and Sharing Findings

Most research projects conclude with a report detailing findings. This report is shared with key stakeholders such as residents, program participants, community leaders, or staff and volunteers.

Considerations:

- How will you analyze the data to answer the research questions? What program will you use (e.g. Excel, SPSS, SAS)?
- What is your strategy for sharing the findings? Who will you share findings with?
- How will you use the findings? How will they help people or strengthen programming?

What Makes a Good Survey Question?

Tips for developing survey questions

#1 **Be clear and concise:** Make sure your questions are not confusing or wordy. Confusing questions will only lead to confused participants and make it difficult for them to provide you with useful information.

Poor: How do you feel about developing a new children's ministry in our church to replace the existing children's ministry which is held in the academy room?

#2 **Avoid vague words or phrases:** Make sure the words you select are clear, concrete, and well-defined. Respondents need to know what you mean.

Poor: Do you read the Bible often?

#3 **Avoid leading/biased questions:** Avoid questions that lead participants to agree or respond in a certain way.

Poor: You wouldn't say that you are in favor of Obama, would you?

#4 **Avoid double barreled questions:** Double barreled questions touch on more than one issue, but allow for only one answer. The respondent can only select one answer and cannot indicate which is being answered.

Poor: Do you feel our church needs a clearer process for developing and participating in new ministries?

#5 **Avoid loaded questions:** Loaded questions are those that suggest a socially desirable answer or are emotionally charged.

Poor: Do you think it is important to share God's love?
Poor: Do you agree with this city's unjust education policies?

#6 **Avoid technical terms and abbreviations:** Do not use technical terms or abbreviations. If you are using a technical term or abbreviation, make sure to define it.

Poor: Should a TANF recipient be allowed to pursue higher education?
Poor: Do you think new members at our church should take an ALPHA class?
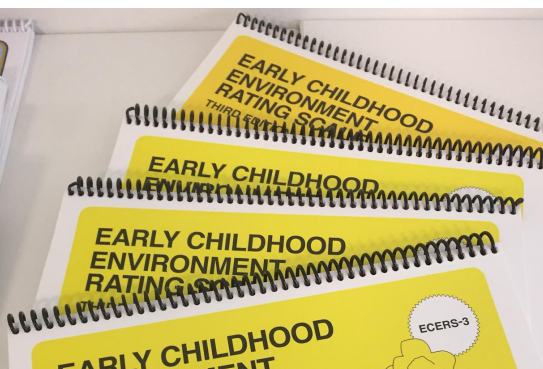
"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry"
James 1:19

#7   **Ensure options are exhaustive:** Make sure that the options offered represent all possible options.

Poor: What is your marital status? (circle one)   Married   Single

#8   **Ensure options are mutually exclusive:** Make sure that only one answer option is applicable for a participant or allow participants to endorse multiple answer choices.

Poor: How long do you spend commuting each day (round trip)?
a) less than 15 minutes, b) 15 to 30 minutes, c) 30 minutes to one hour, or d) one hour or longer?

#9   **Use caution when asking personal questions**: Make sure personal questions are asked sensitively. If possible, avoid highly sensitive questions. If you need to ask a sensitive question that may make participants upset, make sure appropriate supports are in place.

Poor: How much do you earn each year? $_____
Poor: Have you ever been sexually abused?

How will you collect information?

face-to-face interview

PROS
- Can address respondent's questions and probe for fuller understanding
- Facilitate use of more complex instructions or question sequences
- Address personal or sensitive issues
- Quality control on responses

CONS
- More costly and takes more time
- Requires trained interviewers
- Smaller sample size than self-administered data

paper and pencil

PROS
- Cost-efficient
- Use of multiple questions for an area
- Efficient data collection , management, and analysis
- Able to collect from larger sample than interview

CONS
- Works best with more motivated and educated samples
- Lack of quality control on responses
- Limited to easily accessible samples

online

PROS
- Cost-efficient
- Use of multiple questions for an area
- Able to collect from larger sample than interview
- Use of widely dispersed sample
- Respondents can complete at a convenient time

CONS
- Works best with more motivated and educated samples
- Lack of quality control on responses
- Limited to those with computer knowledge and access