

# 7. Collecting the information

The purpose of this chapter is to show you the main things to keep in mind when collecting your information (safety, confidentiality and clarity) and the possible methods you can choose from when collecting information. Most methods can actually be used to collect information for both monitoring and evaluation purposes. However, there is a separate section with tips on how to keep records, which is the backbone of monitoring.

## General points

.....

### Key ideas

- Ensure the personal safety of those collecting and giving information by anticipating and avoiding dangerous situations.
  - Ensure that confidentiality is always respected, with the exception of what the law dictates and in cases where someone might suffer harm.
  - Establish procedures to ensure the confidentiality of information and make sure that your staff understand their importance and follow them.
  - Inform your respondents how the information they provide will be used and how their confidentiality will be respected. Respect the wishes of your respondents.
  - Do not ask leading questions or questions that mix different subject matters, that are unnecessarily personal or invasive or that raise expectations.
- .....

## **Safety first**

Most of you work with communities and people you know well. Therefore, you might not think in terms of ensuring the safety of those who collect or provide information. However, it is always important to ensure the personal safety of those collecting and giving information by anticipating and avoiding dangerous situations. The very nature of prevention work may mean operating in communities and neighbourhoods in which violence is a possibility. When you believe that the evaluation may place someone in a risky situation, such as a violent neighbourhood, or contact with potentially dangerous people, seek guidance from reliable persons in the community. Moreover, picking the right (safe) setting is an important way to build a sense of trust and safety. For example, conducting group sessions in a public setting may discourage open discussion because of the sensitivity of the issue.

### ***You need a safe place to collect good information***

*Poor information was usually collected when outreach activities were conducted near drinking places, because drunken people would come and disrupt them, threatening to injure or destroy equipment, and this usually led to the abandonment of the activities.*

Family Health Trust, Zambia

## **Confidentiality**

Monitoring and evaluation require the collection of information, including information about individuals, their behaviour, their opinions, their thoughts and feelings. Some of this information is sensitive and respondents will want reassurance that their identities will not be revealed without their permission and that the information they have provided will remain confidential.

Meeting those expectations is essential to ensuring that they and others will cooperate with research and evaluation in the future. It is also the ethical approach. A further reason to respect confidentiality is that many States have laws about how confidential information is collected and stored and under what conditions it can and should be released. There are usually special regulations about obtaining and using information from or about young people and certainly about substance abuse. This handbook cannot give details of the situation in all countries in the world, but do make sure that you are aware of any relevant legislation in your country.

Besides laws, your organization should have rules about the way such information is stored and how it is used. Make sure that you follow these rules. Ensure that staff and volunteers recognize the importance of maintaining confidentiality, not just for bureaucratic considerations, but also out of respect for the individuals who have provided the information. In general you will need to develop procedures:

- To make records anonymous.
- To store data securely.
- To control who is allowed access to which data, including procedures to control access to sensitive material stored on computers (passwords, rules about copying data, etc.).

### ***Making records anonymous***

*We made sure that the only people who knew respondents' names were the people who interviewed them. This information was not written on the interview sheet.*

This example is invented, but is based on actual practice.

Explain to the people from whom you collect information that you will protect their confidentiality. In general, it is good practice to ask people to sign a consent form. In signing a consent form, your respondents tell you in writing that you can use the information they are going to give you for a certain purpose. Therefore, a consent form will explain the purpose of the evaluation, who is doing it and how the results will be used. The consent form can also indicate that respondents can opt out of answering questions they are uncomfortable with or can stop the interview or questioning. When you are collecting information from young children, you may need to obtain their parents' consent.

If you plan to use the information you collect in a form that will identify respondents as individuals (for example, by using their pictures or their stories) or if you are passing the information on to other organizations, ask respondents to sign a release form permitting you to use their photographic image or information about them in specified ways. This may be necessary in situations in which the sample is very small or if there is a good reason to identify someone—perhaps because they occupy a special position. Respect the wishes of the people from whom data are collected. Remember that the trust they have placed in your organization, once shaken, will be difficult to re-establish.

When writing reports that use data collected from individuals, be sure that no individual can be recognized from the descriptions you give. This may involve altering certain facts to disguise a person's identity. Be particularly careful when the sample size is small or when respondents come from a small area or are known to each other. On the other hand, if you do make changes to protect the identity of respondents, they should be limited to issues not directly connected with the conclusions that you are drawing, and it should be stated that changes have been made to the data.

Ensure that those analysing the data understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality and seek to do so. It may be useful to code answers with numbers and keep the names in a very secure place. Any data collected should be disposed of securely (by shredding, for example, as opposed to throwing into a bin) after they have been used for the intended purpose. If data are stored on a computer system, ensure that all traces are removed when files are deleted.

There may be extreme cases where confidentiality must be broken, for example, in situations where evidence of wrongdoing or criminal activities is uncovered through your work. In some countries there is a legal duty to report certain suspicions. Ensure that you comply with the laws of your country and the duties of your profession.

### ***Clarity and respect***

To maximize your chances of obtaining useful information, it is important to ask questions that are clear and respectful. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Do not ask leading questions. For example, asking “Do you agree that the youth team is doing a good job?” invites a “yes” answer and does not tell you much. Instead, ask questions neutrally, for example “How would you rate the work of the youth team, is it: very good, good, not sure, poor, very poor?”
- Ask about one thing at a time. For example, in asking “How do you feel about the project and the people running it?”, you might get an answer to one part of the question or the other, or an answer that mixes the two. Moreover, instead of asking “How do you feel about the project?” you might want to be a bit more **specific** and ask about a part of the project. For example, “How do you feel about this particular activity of the project?”
- Do not ask unnecessarily personal or invasive questions, for example “How many pregnancies have you had?” This is a very personal question and could cause distress, so ask such questions only when they are really necessary to the evaluation.
- Do not raise expectations that you cannot meet, for example asking “Would you like a new youth centre?”, when there is no prospect of getting one. Always make the actual situation clear, for example “We are thinking about expanding our activities. Of course, we do not know whether it will be possible, because we would need to raise the funds, but if you had to express a wish ...” or something like this.

## Collecting monitoring information

---

### **Key ideas**

- The backbone of monitoring is keeping a record of information when and as activities occur and asking participants for their feedback.
- If you are using a form, keep it simple, test it and find a way to encourage participants to actually use it.
- Sometimes you can devise ways for your young participants to create records by themselves or you can obtain information on staff feedback forms or minutes of meetings.

Working with young people has many different aspects. In just one session the roles undertaken by workers and volunteers may include group worker, teacher, confidant, counsellor and many more. To these roles we should add record-keeper.

Monitoring is about keeping track of how a project is being implemented, and the best way to keep track of something is to record what is happening as it is happening—in other words, to keep records of what is happening. Keeping records is the backbone of good monitoring. There are two types of record. Some records focus on individuals or groups of young people. These need to be kept confidential. Other records focus on the achievements of the project. They include reports of events and may contain photographs and video recordings as well as written records. Both types are useful in monitoring the work of the project and, later on, in evaluating it. In general, whenever possible, feedback should be requested from participants as to their thoughts and feelings about the activities they participated in.

To be useful in monitoring and evaluation, records need to be sufficiently detailed. For example, if an objective is to work with 10 at-risk youth and increase their self-esteem, then the records might indicate: how many young people you have worked with; something about the characteristics of those young people (including age, sex, whether they went to school or not and whether they lived with their family or not), how many times you have worked with them, for how long and doing what; and any changes that have been observed in their behaviour.

You could then compare these records with the objective, note your progress towards it and make any necessary changes to the work. In an evaluation, the evaluator may test the veracity of the record by talking with the young people involved and seeing if their account of the work tallies with the record.

At the same time you need to keep your records simple, covering only the information you really need. If a record takes too long to fill in, it will probably contain superfluous information. Recording needs to be made easy by using well-designed forms. It might be a good idea to design a form, test it for a while and then revise it. Even in the case of concise and well-designed record-keeping forms, workers and volunteers may need help and encouragement to keep records. Many workers with young people are less interested in writing than in doing the work. Time needs to be allocated for creating records and management needs to give encouragement to their staff to complete them. Records should be stored so that others with access rights to them can use them effectively.

Young participants can create their own records. A simple example is maintaining records of who attends a youth club. If young people sign themselves in, this automatically creates a record of attendance. All that needs to be done is to reach a total at the end of the session. Young people could record some additional data about themselves on the sign-in sheet (age and sex, for example). This would make this record even more useful for monitoring purposes. Encouraging young people to reflect on their experiences through writing, photography or some other medium can also create a record that can be used for monitoring purposes.

Records should be factually accurate and avoid reporting gossip or hearsay, although feelings and hunches may form part of some records. For example, perhaps you notice that a young



person is depressed and withdrawn and you feel that he or she might have been the victim of some kind of abuse. In your role as a counsellor, it would be acceptable to record this feeling or hunch so that effective action could be taken if similar symptoms persisted. Confidential records must be securely stored, and everyone needs to understand the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

Other examples of monitoring include notes of meetings and staff feedback books. These can be rich sources of data for evaluation, recording key decisions and when they were made and sometimes identifying difficult issues that were the subject of discussion. Meeting notes will also record who was present and thus help identify the “key players” in a project. Some projects keep staff feedback books. For example, at the end of a youth work session, staff may write down some key points about how it went, ideas for future sessions and any concerns they may have about the work or even about individuals. Young people’s views may also be recorded, sometimes by the young people themselves.

Finally, you will need to keep accurate financial records. This is not as difficult as it sounds, but it is also an area in which you need the help of someone with experience, to be sure that you respond to your legal requirements and to the requirements of your donors. Financial records are particularly important if you intend to conduct a cost evaluation.

### Collecting evaluation information

Data collection methods for monitoring and evaluation purposes do not differ significantly from the methods that you would use to undertake a needs assessment. The methods you can choose from, their pros and cons, and what needs to be done have been described many times in many other publications, including our handbook and training materials on planning.\* The table opposite describes collection methods.

### Sampling

If methods are about deciding how to collect the necessary information, sampling is about deciding who you will collect the necessary information from. In an ideal world, you would be able to collect information from or about your entire target group. However, in reality this is seldom possible. If you cannot obtain information from your entire target group, for example, because it is too large, you will need to obtain information from only a part of it. This is called a “sample”. The different kinds of samples used by researchers are discussed below.

---

\*See United Nations, Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *A Participatory Handbook for Youth Drug Abuse Prevention Programmes: a Guide for Development and Improvement* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.XI.10) (<http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/pdf/handbook.pdf>); World Health Organization, *Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse: a Workbook for Project Operators* ([http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/global\\_initiative/pdf/initiative\\_activities\\_workbook.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/global_initiative/pdf/initiative_activities_workbook.pdf)); and World Health Organization, *Primary Prevention of Substance Abuse: a Facilitator Guide* ([http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/global\\_initiative/pdf/initiative\\_activities\\_facilitator\\_guide.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/youthnet/global_initiative/pdf/initiative_activities_facilitator_guide.pdf)).

*Data collection methods*

NAME	SHORT DESCRIPTION
(Self-administered) questionnaire	A questionnaire offers respondents a list of questions to answer in writing.
Interview	In an interview, someone asks questions of individuals and records their answers.
Snapshot survey	This is a series of interviews that collect relatively simple data over a short timescale.
Case study	Case studies involve collecting detailed information about a few individuals or situations by talking in depth with a few respondents and writing about their experiences.
Focus-group discussion	A focus-group discussion is a group interview. A group of respondents are asked about their experiences and opinions. Focus-group members may or may not know each other already.
Observed discussion group	A group is given a topic to discuss and the observer records relevant points. This method lies between the more structured focus-group discussion and the less structured listening survey.
Listening survey	The evaluator notes the content of unstructured and unsupervised conversations.
(Systematic) observation	We make observations all the time—doing so systematically can provide useful monitoring and evaluation information. Participant observation is where the observer takes part in the activities of the group he or she is studying.
Photo analysis	Photographs are used to assist in the assessment of the parts of the programme that are being evaluated.
Electronic data generation	Some data generated by interaction via computer systems can be used for evaluation purposes, such as the number of visits to a website.
Performance	Participants act out situations (for example, situations before and after the project) and the content is noted.
Maps	Participants draw a map to describe physical and social interaction patterns (for example, places that are important in their lives before and after the project).
Opinion poll	People are asked to vote on what they think about a topic. Opinion polls can be carried out via short questionnaires and/or interviews in person or over the web or mobile phones.

### ***Representative sample***

If you want to be able to use the information from the sample as a description of your larger target group, your sample should be “representative”, that is, it should be as similar as possible in terms of certain characteristics to the larger target group. It will be difficult for you to make it completely representative. However, you should take care to create a representative sample as far as the important characteristics are concerned.

For example, let’s suppose that you want to obtain a picture of what young people would want your non-governmental organizations to do in your neighbourhood. It may be very easy for you to ask a few of the students in the private school down the road. However, that would hardly be a sample that is representative of your neighbourhood, which also has two large state-funded schools, where youth come from very different socio-economic backgrounds and are bound to have different needs. A way to make the sample more representative would be to ask young people from all the schools and, if some schools are larger than others, ask more young people from those schools.

In many circumstances, it will not be essential to have a perfectly representative sample. In the case above, it might be enough to ask the young people who are present at the youth centre on an average afternoon; that is, there is nothing special happening either at the youth centre or outside, so that would be your “normal” number and kind of participants. Simply explaining how you attempted to make the sample representative of your target group lends more credibility to your results.

However, if you are conducting an evaluation with an experimental or quasi-experimental design, the representativeness of your sample becomes very important, in which case, you would probably have already enlisted the help of an expert evaluator.

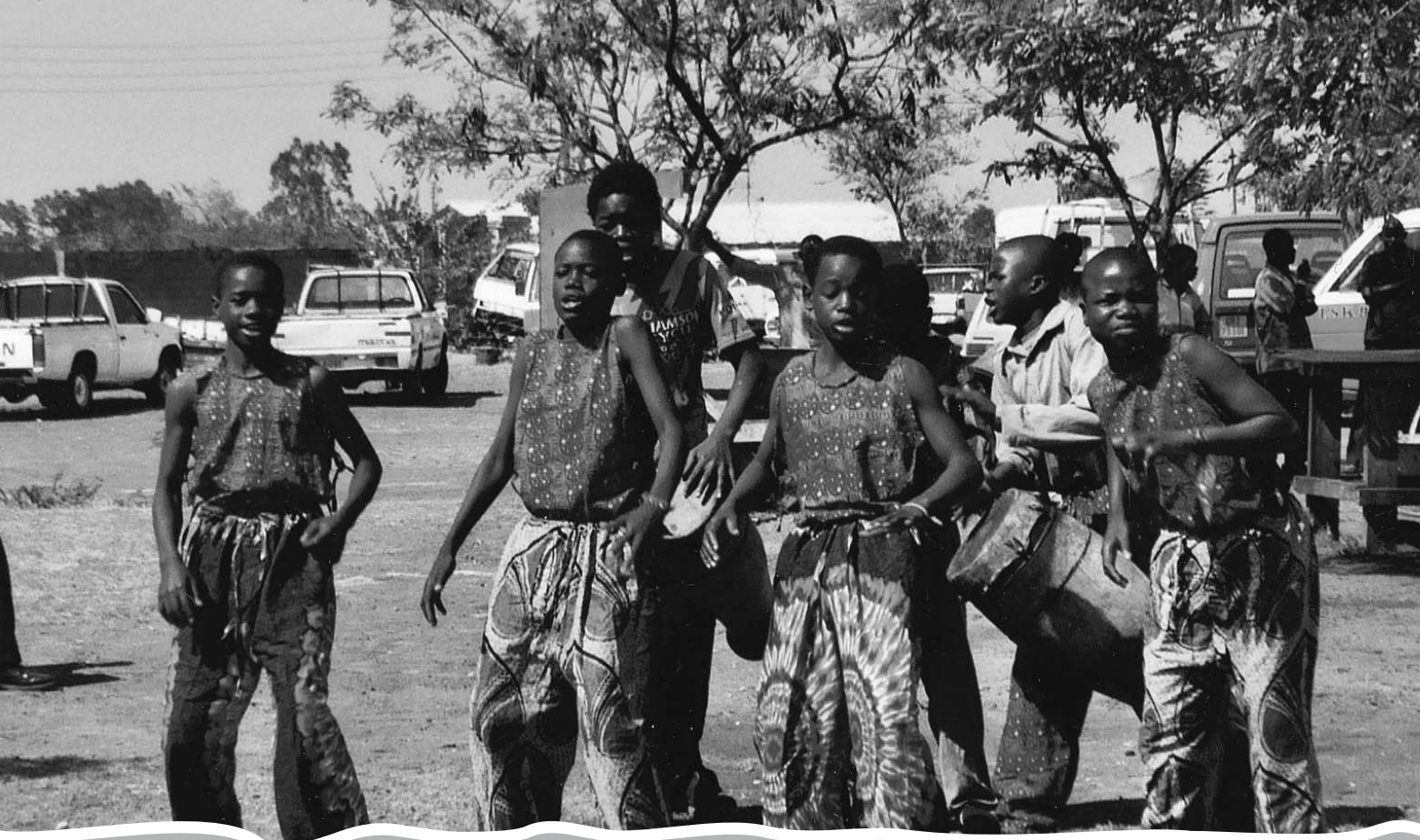
### ***Convenience sample***

A convenience sample contains subjects who are easy to contact. For example, suppose you wanted to get a quick idea of what club members thought about a certain proposal. You could ask the first 10 people who came through the door that evening. The problem with a convenience sample is that it is not necessarily representative of the whole population.

### ***Snowball sample***

A snowball sample is one obtained by asking subjects to put you in touch with others. In this way, the sample gets bigger as you go on, like rolling a snowball. If you wanted to interview dependent drug users, but knew only two and you guessed that it would be difficult to contact others, then you could interview the two you knew and ask them to put you in touch with others whom they knew. This way, you could reach three more people and they might suggest others so that eventually you had a large enough sample. Snowball sampling is also not representative, but it is very useful when you are trying to get information about or from people who are hard to reach.





# 8.

## Analysing the data and using the information you have collected

What are you going to do with all these data that you have collected during monitoring and evaluation? Well, you will need to analyse them and use them somehow. Ideally, you will not have collected huge amounts of data through your monitoring and your analysis should be relatively straightforward. However, if your project (or the amount of data collected) is large, you should find the general points that we make below about analysing data and reporting information for evaluation equally useful for your monitoring needs. We have already discussed some general points about using your monitoring results in chapter VI in the section “Monitoring, evaluation and project implementation”. In this chapter, you will find some general suggestions about using your evaluation results.

### Analysis

.....

#### Key ideas

- You can effectively summarize quantitative data through ranges and averages. There are different kinds of averages and you should be careful to choose the one that distorts reality the least.
  - To analyse qualitative data, you must systematize your records and reflect on them. If you have large amounts of questionnaire or interview data, you will need to “code” the answers given to your questions in order to group similar ones.
  - Triangulate, triangulate, triangulate!
- .....

It cannot be stated too often that analysing the data you have collected is not something that will happen by itself. Indeed, it is something that can require considerable resources. The purpose of this section is to give you an idea of how to analyse the data you have collected. Statistical analysis can be a very specialized field; however, not all statistical analysis needs to be daunting, and there are simple kinds of statistical analysis that anyone with a basic understanding of arithmetic can perform without specialized statistical training.

If you have carried out a survey using self-administered questionnaires or interviews, you will have series of data, normally of two kinds: quantitative (numbers of various kinds) and qualitative. In the first section we look at how to work with both kinds. The other qualitative techniques will not normally generate large series of data (i.e. a reply to one question by many people) that can be compiled and compared. However, those records will need to be systematized (see the second part of the section) before you move on to analysing the whole body of information together (which is discussed in the last part of the section).

### ***Analysis should not be an afterthought!***

*For the planning stage, the one thing that we would do differently next time is to organize a means of analysing the data before we went ahead with the survey. If this part is left to the last minute, it can be a huge obstacle and it can actually render our efforts useless. We had questionnaires that were sitting in our offices and they could not be analysed owing to insufficient planning. Next time we would plan the whole evaluation process from designing the questionnaire to collecting the information to analysing the data.*

Youth for Christ, Pretoria

### ***Analysis of surveys***

Let's suppose that you are the project manager of a youth centre and you have asked 53 members of the centre to fill in an anonymous questionnaire that asked respondents four questions: their sex; age; what they liked about the youth clubs and how many times they had smoked marijuana in the last month. (We are using a self-administered questionnaire as an example, but the same ideas could be applied if you had interviewed the respondents face-to-face.)

To analyse the data, the best approach is to use a spreadsheet, a kind of computer program that allows you to create tables and use them to make calculations. If you have few data, you can create a table and then do the calculations by hand. In this case you would create a table like this:

NUMBER	SEX	AGE	WHAT THEY LIKED ABOUT THE YOUTH CLUB	NUMBER OF TIMES HE OR SHE SMOKED MARIJUANA IN THE LAST MONTH
1	F	11	I meet my friends	0
2	M	13	Meeting people	1
3	M	14	The football tournament	0
4	Unknown	Unknown	The football tournament	0
Etc.				

Now you can start to play around with the data (yes, it can be fun!). A few values that you could calculate and use to summarize your data are described below.

### *Lowest/highest score*

Let's look first at the age of the respondents and pretend that, going through all the records, you see that the lowest age says "11" and the highest "16". You could then say that the age of the respondents ranges from 11 to 16. If your group of respondents is a representative sample of the youth that come to your centre, you could state with reasonable confidence that "the age of the members of our youth club ranges from 11 to 16".

### *Mean (average)*

Another easy way to analyse and summarize your information is to calculate the "mean" of the data. This is the most common kind of average, so much so that it is commonly referred to as "the 'average'". Your average (or better, your mean) would be found by adding all the ages and dividing the result by the number of people you have included in the calculation. In this particular instance, you have 51 people who actually replied to this question. You had 53 respondents, but 2 forgot or didn't want to give you their ages, so you really have only 51 replies. Therefore, your average would be equal to  $(11 + 13 + 14 + \dots)/51$ .

You need to be a bit careful with averages, however. An average is a good summary of data when, as in this case, they do not differ too much from each other. If data differ a lot, the average will give you a distorted summary of reality. Of course, all summaries of information distort reality up to a point. The trick is to choose the one that best represents reality. Look, for example, at the case of how many times the members of your club smoked marijuana in the last month. Let's say only 47 people actually replied to this particular question, so the calculation of your average would be  $(0 + 1 + 0 + 0 + \dots)/47 = \dots$ . Let's assume that your average would be 1.02, that is, that, on average, the members of your youth club smoked marijuana once in the last month.

But, hold on! You know your club members well and you know that most of them have never smoked marijuana or at least not since they have been attending your club. Maybe you are very,

very wrong ... or maybe the average is not the best way to summarize your data. Let's go back to the counting. You will find out that, of the 47 people who replied to this question:

- Thirty-five stated that they had never smoked in the last 30 days.
- Two stated that they had smoked once in the last 30 days.
- Two stated that they had smoked three times in the last 30 days.
- Four stated that they had smoked four times in the last 30 days.
- Four stated that they had smoked six times in the last 30 days.

Therefore, in reality, the majority of the young people in this group have not smoked marijuana. The reason why the average is more than once a month is because there are a few who have smoked quite a few times. These cases are called "extreme scores" or "outliers" and we say that the average is "sensitive" to extreme scores or outliers. In cases like this, you may want to use another kind of average.

### *Mode*

You might want to calculate the "mode". The mode is the "most scored score", the most frequently reported number in a set of data. In the group above, that would be 0, as the majority of respondents reported that they had not smoked marijuana.

### *Median*

A similar kind of measure is the "median". The median is the score below which half of the scores fall. The best way to visualize (and calculate) this is to write down all of the scores one below the other in ascending order and find the one that is in the middle of the row. If there are two, average them. In the example above, at least 50 per cent of respondents, that is, at least half of them, reported that they had not smoked in the previous month. Therefore the median is also 0.

### *Qualitative data and analysis*

Before starting to process qualitative data, you need to prepare them a bit. Your question about what young people liked about the youth club was open-ended, that is, it did not require a yes/no answer and you did not provide a choice of possible answers, therefore each respondent was free to write whatever he or she wanted. To summarize the information, you will need to code it or create a "coding frame". How do you do this? You look at the answers and you group similar ones. For example, there were many people who said something like "meet new people", "chat with friends" or "meet people". You could say that they all liked to come to the centre because they like to meet friends/people.

Similarly, all of those who mentioned football and basketball could be said to come to the youth centre because they like the activities organized by the youth centre (which are, in fact, basketball and football). There will always be people who state things that are difficult to categorize: "I like the atmosphere", "Cakes are nice", and so you will have a category called

“Other”. You will not be able to actually understand some of the things written or some people will not fill the answers in, so you will have a category “Unknown”. Your table, at this point, will look like this:

NUMBER	SEX	AGE	WHAT THEY LIKED ABOUT THE YOUTH CLUB	CODE ABOUT LIKING	NUMBER OF TIMES HE OR SHE SMOKED MARIJUANA IN THE LAST MONTH
1	F	11	I meet my friends	Meeting people	0
2	M	13	Meeting people	Meeting people	1
3	M	14	The football tournament	Club activities	0
4	Unknown	Unknown	The football tournament	Club activities	0
Etc.					

Now, you can also count the answers to this question. You would get quite interesting results such as:

- Twenty-nine people said they liked the club because they could meet other people.
- Seventeen people said they liked the club activities.
- Five wrote things that could not be classified.
- Two did not answer this question or the answers were illegible.

So, if you didn’t know already (and if you did, this is a confirmation), you now know that the club is popular as a place to meet others and to a lesser, but important extent, to participate in its activities.

### *Cross-tabulation*

Now you could examine the data in a slightly more sophisticated way by looking for any differences between boys and girls in their answers to the question about what they liked. In other words, you are looking at how one variable (sex) relates to another (likes); this is called a “cross-tabulation”. Say that with a total of 30 girls and 20 boys, you got the following results:

- Twenty-three girls liked the club because they could meet other people.
- Five boys liked the club because they could meet other people.
- Four girls liked the club activities.
- Thirteen boys liked the club activities.
- Two girls wrote things that could not be classified.
- Two boys wrote things that could not be classified.
- One girl did not answer this question or her answer was illegible.



Now, this is really interesting. If the group that answered the questionnaire is representative of the people who come to the youth centre, it is clear that: (a) this club is putting on activities that boys like a lot, but that girls do not; and (b) there are still more girls than boys coming to the youth centre, primarily to meet people and friends. Depending on your initial objective(s), this finding might suggest different sorts of future action.

### ***Analysis of results from other qualitative data collection methods***

Normally, as a project manager, you would not have done only a survey. You would have undertaken some in-depth interviews with some key informants, done some observations, had some focus group discussions or led group work on the basis of performance or visual representations. You will need to analyse the results of all of these.

Essentially, this will involve a process of systematizing the transcripts and notes and summarizing the main points. Apart from being as systematic as possible, the only important thing to keep in mind is to resist the temptation to extrapolate quantitative information from the results of these data collection methods. The sample of a focus group discussion or of a few in-depth interviews is simply not representative enough.

If you have used the same methods and questions with different respondents (for example, with boys and girls, or with one key informant each from different stakeholders), it may be a good idea to compare responses and think about what the differences (or lack of differences) might mean. In fact, if you have results from more than a handful of data collection activities, you could print them and cut them into pieces according to the main themes and patterns that emerge. Do not forget to always write on each piece where it comes from. Working on bunches of pieces that make points on the same issue or on similar ones is easiest.

### ***Triangulation***

The final part of the analysis is when you bring together all the information you have collected into a coherent whole. As already mentioned, it is strongly recommended that you collect information from different sources and/or using different methods. Remember that people do tend to provide the answers they think are appropriate or they think you want. It is therefore important to be able to compare results and thus validate them. For example, the results of your interviews might tell you that fewer street children are sniffing glue. However, the results of your observations tell you that as many street children are sniffing glue as before. How do you reconcile these two results? The conclusion you arrive at will always be based on a certain amount of subjective choice, but it should be based on additional information that either you already have or that you collect for the purpose. Always remember to triangulate with facts, not opinions. Do not use information that you cannot document.



## Report it

### Key ideas

- Decide for whom the report is being written. Different versions may be needed for different audiences. In all versions, use clear language and illustrations.
- Think carefully about the conclusions and recommendations and do not draw conclusions that are not justified by the data.
- Written reports have an important place, but consider using different methods of reporting, such as video and drama.

One of the most common ways to disseminate the results of an evaluation is to produce a written report. The first consideration is that a report should provide honest, reliable and considered information. Conclusions and recommendations will be expected. No evaluation, however thorough, can gain a complete picture of what has happened. There will always be loose ends and missing data, and knowledge of interventions will always be partial. The sample will very often not be representative. Be modest, therefore, when drawing conclusions from data. Do not “go beyond the data”: common sense is useful here! For example, just because 100 per cent of the girls in a sample say they hate football does not necessarily justify the conclusion that all girls hate football—especially if you ask only very few of them!

The recommendations will need similar careful consideration. Base them on the findings. For example, if one conclusion is that not all objectives are being met because of staff shortages, then an obvious recommendation is to do something about staffing. The conclusion about whether the objectives are being met will need to be honest, saying that only some of the objectives are being met, but qualify this with the fact that this was due to staffing problems. What if an evaluation is very negative? It’s easy for an evaluator to be critical, and more difficult to acknowledge achievements. Make sure that you include some positive comments in your conclusions. Even the worst project has some good points.

In general, it is best to avoid “academic” language—write clearly and directly. A short summary of the main points in the report is a useful document for people who want a quick overview. A summary written in simple language can be useful for people who have poor literacy skills. Make use of drawings, graphics and photographs. A report is not necessarily a book; it could be a video, CD-ROM or website, or even a performance or a piece of artwork. In fact, you will probably find that it is better to write different versions of the reports, suited to the needs of different people.

If you are going to present quantitative data, remember that there are different ways to present your data in a user-friendly way. Think about our example in the previous section. Our analysis had arrived at the following findings:

- Twenty-three girls liked the club because they could meet other people.
- Five boys liked the club because they could meet other people.
- Four girls liked the club activities.

- Thirteen boys liked the club activities.
- Two girls wrote things that could not be classified.
- Two boys wrote things that could not be classified.
- One girl didn't answer this question or her answer was illegible.

These findings are interesting. However, maybe there are more user-friendly ways to present them, that is, ways that make it easier to understand the main points arising from the finding. For example, to make this information clearer, these results could be written as percentages:

- More than three quarters of the girls, but only a quarter of the boys, liked the club because they could meet other people.
- Approximately two thirds of the boys, but only 14 per cent of the girls liked the club activities.

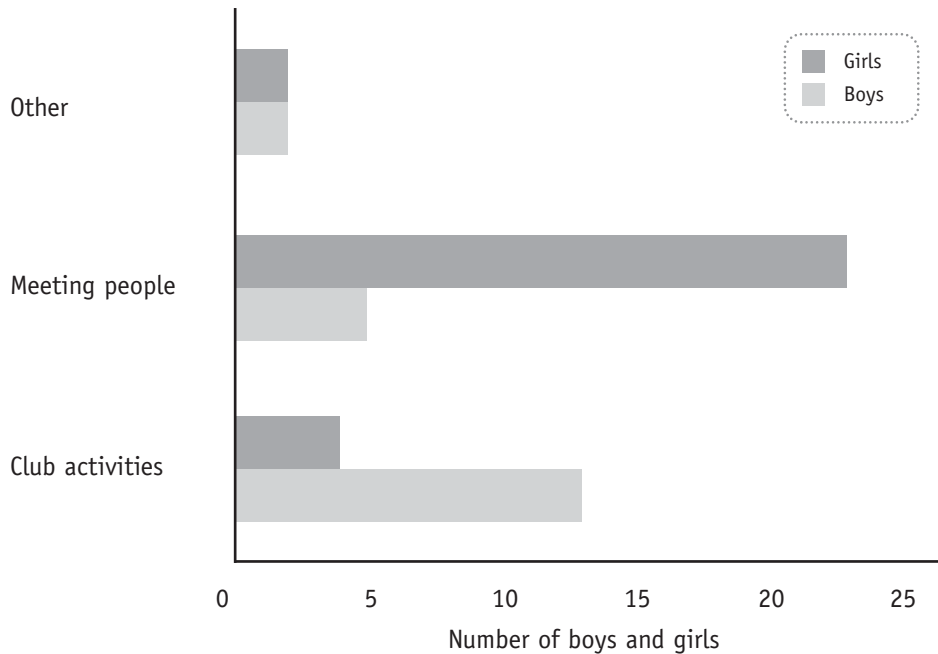
Some people find tables easier to read than figures in the text, so these results could be shown as a table, like this:

Reasons for liking the club	GIRLS		BOYS	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Meeting people	23	79	5	25
Club activities	4	14	13	65
Other	2	7	2	10

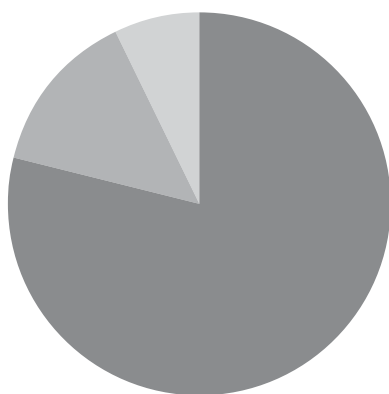
Many people will be happy with a visual representation that clearly shows the differences between boys and girls, even if less precisely than the figures. You could use a graph. A graph is the visual representation of data arranged along two axes. Specifically, you could use a "histogram", also known as a bar chart. A bar chart arranges the data in bars along an axis. From the example below it is still very clear that it is boys who overwhelmingly like club activities and that the vast majority of girls visit the club in order to meet people rather than for its activities.

Pie charts are another common way of representing data visually, but they tend to distort the representation of data. That is why, if you are preparing a report for a scientific journal, it would not be a good idea to use them. However, in presenting data to a community audience, they are also effective. This is the same data presented in a pie chart:

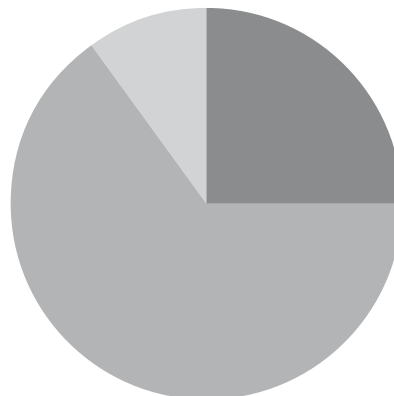
### REASONS FOR LIKING THE CLUB



### GIRLS



### BOYS



■ Meeting people   ■ Club activities   ■ Other

## Use it!

### Key ideas

Use the results of your evaluation:

- To acknowledge the work of your colleagues/staff/volunteers and the contribution of the many stakeholders in the community.
- As the starting point of a process of reflection on how to improve the work of the organization.
- To promote substance abuse prevention and the work of your organization with the community and the donors.
- In the context of planning your future activities.

As mentioned earlier, there is little point in collecting and analysing all this information if you do not use the results. We hope that you will have thought about what you need the results of the evaluation for while planning your evaluation. As we have seen, this would usually have helped you choose how you collected and analysed your data. However, here are some general points about using your evaluation results for your consideration and inspiration.

### Other uses

*The results of our monitoring and evaluation activities were used in activities other than the UNDCP/World Health Organization project. As an example, we used them in improving our strategies for and approaches to monitoring and evaluating our activities in a project on protecting children from child labour and drug abuse, an International Labour Organization programme.*

Addictus, Manila

Improve the work of your organization. If the results of the evaluation are positive, you may want to take the opportunity to boost the morale and motivation of your staff and volunteers with a well-deserved meeting of celebration. This is also true of the many stakeholders who may have made even a small contribution, which should be acknowledged nonetheless. If you have good news, be generous with them, call a community meeting and find a way to thank and recognize the work and contribution of the many people you have involved. This can go a long way towards keeping them happy about the project, motivated and ... ready to help again.

In any case, and especially if the results of the evaluation were not so positive, you may want to consider using them as the starting point of a process of reflection on how to improve the work of the organization. Depending on the size of your organization, you may need to organize

a general discussion to introduce and plan the process, then different discussions with different groups of staff/volunteers/participants and, finally, a general meeting to arrive at common understandings and decisions. Together with your colleagues/staff/volunteers/participants, you may also want to transform the results of the evaluation into documents that can be used by everyone in their day-to-day work, for example, a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” that could be used in staff training or as a checklist of good practice.

The results of the evaluation could also be used to raise awareness of the work of the organization and/or the problem of substance abuse prevention. In addition to holding community meetings, make copies of the results, or copies of the summary, widely available. If you are working in an area where different languages are spoken, consider producing the summary in those different languages. Make contact with journalists and promote your work among them; do the same with past and possible donors. Write a press release: even if the evaluation report is quite critical of the project, it can be used to demonstrate that lessons are being learned and changes made and it is also better if everybody hears your version of the situation first.

Finally, as suggested above, use the results of your evaluation when the time comes to plan new activities of the same kind or in the same area. Evaluations can be a very good source of information about a particular community, how to work with it or how to work on a certain issue. Whichever way you decide to go, do not forget to include a good monitoring and evaluation component in your next project as well.

