Sampling Overview

Purpose – to provide a general overview of sampling issues, and support approaches that will ensure the perspectives and opinions you capture from a small number of individuals properly represents the perspectives and opinions of the entire group or population

At this point in the needs analysis, you know what questions you'd like answered and which individuals or groups might have information to answer them. But how do you choose which *individuals* to approach in order to gather your data? Most needs analyses will collect information from a variety of sources using several different methods. This is known as a *mixed methods* approach, and it usually involves more than one approach to selecting samples of individuals to engage with for data collection.

First a *probability sampling* is used to ensure for the group of individuals chosen is representative of the entire group (this is called generalization). This is often supplemented by *purposive sampling,* which is used to gather data for specific investigative questions that require deeper perspective from unique groups of performers or informants. Here is an overview of each type of sampling and when it is typically used:

Types of Probability Sampling	Types of Purposive Sampling
Random Sample: ensures you can confidently generalize results to the larger population in one of two methods: simple - every member of the entire population has an equal chance of being selected; systemic – choose from a randomized population list in a structured way (every 12th person, for example)	Exemplar – sometimes called *success case* study, this method is sometimes associated with a positive focused technique called *appreciative inquiry*, this method involves identification of top performers in order to study what contributes to their success
Stratified – major subgroups within the population are identified first, then random samples are pulled from each in proportion to their size in the general population; this ensures small, geographically dispersed, or key stakeholder groups are sampled in large enough numbers to generalize to their subgroup	Snowball – rely on insider knowledge from the various groups of informants to identify useful cases to include; this method ensures a variety of specific examples will be included but requires strong trust between the data sources and the researchers
Cluster – naturally occurring sub-populations (clinics, families, towns) are identified and a random sample of these groups is chosen; this is useful when travel is difficult or expensive and the sub-group populations are relatively similar	Convenience – selection of individuals who are easily at hand and willing to participate; this is the least desirable method since it is not likely to be as transferrable or representative but is lowest in cost
When to use Probability Sampling	When to use Purposive Sampling
When you want to understand the size or prevalence of an issue or factor that is affecting performance—how widespread is it?	When you have an interest in the perspective of a specific group or category of individuals—what do "XYZs" think?
When you want to know if a problem or need is consistent from place to place and group to group—is it the same everywhere?	When you want to look at extremes to highlight the differences in factors that contribute to their

	differences—who are the best at this and why? Who are the least effective and why?
When the group is large, resources are tight, and you cannot gather data from everyone, but want ensure smaller numbers can represent the perspectives of the entire group—what small group can validly speak for everyone?	When you want to test a hypothesis about what might be happening—data suggest two factors may be related, who can best confirm this?

Tips:
- o Ensure you have a realistic perspective on the number of individuals in each group and how likely it is that you will be able to engage with them
- o If you have strongly opinioned groups, be sure that they are represented appropriately in proportion to their size—it is easy for small, opinioned groups to dominate the data if you are not careful

Be sure to consider gender, age, ethnicity, or other demographics of note when selecting samples so that disadvantaged groups or those less visible are appropriately included.