Toolkit for the OSEP TA & D Network on How to Evaluate Dissemination

A Component of the Dissemination Initiative

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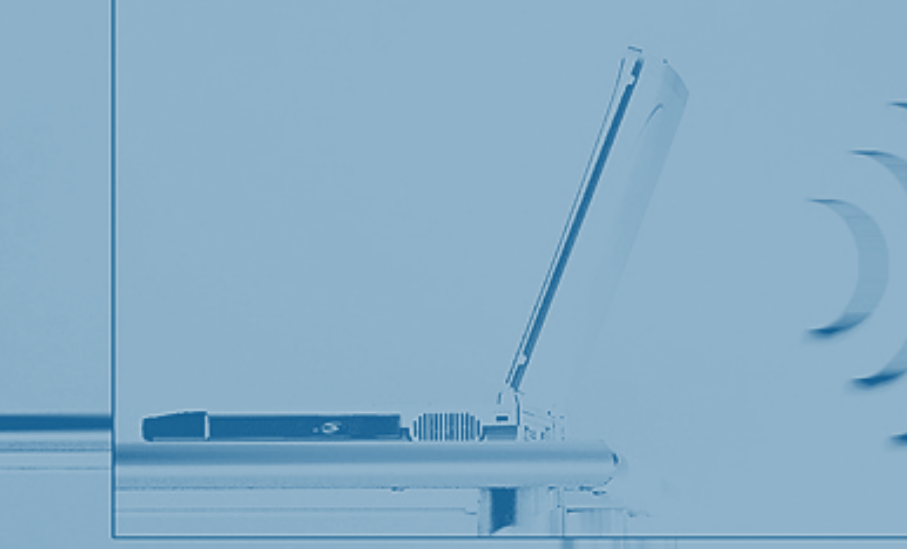
NICHCY

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

Contents

Introduction

Dissemination – for TA & D projects – is essentially about transferring information and resources, building knowledge and skills, and enhancing capacities within the special education and disability communities they serve – i.e., persons with disabilities and their families, service providers and other professionals, as well as with other projects within the TA & D Network. OSEP has asked that the network's dissemination work be relevant, of high quality, and easily applied and used by target audiences.

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) has been charged with providing information and resources to the TA & D Network projects to support effective dissemination. TA & D projects serve many audiences, including State Education Agencies, school administrators, working teachers, early intervention providers, and families. In order to deliver information and resources to those varied intended audiences in ways that promote improved practice for students, projects will need to implement a variety of dissemination strategies.

This toolkit is intended to provide guidance to OSEP's TA & D projects in evaluating dissemination strategies, methods, and products. Evaluation of dissemination may be done by a project director, a dissemination coordinator, or an evaluator (depending upon your staffing). It is one element of the National

Dissemination Center's larger Dissemination Initiative, available on our website at http://nichcy.org/ dissemination/tools. We hope this document and our other dissemination resources will be helpful in increasing the effectiveness of your project's dissemination efforts.

This toolkit includes an overall framework for providing: 1) the need to evaluate dissemination plans; 2) descriptions and examples of three main approaches in evaluation of dissemination; 3) brief overviews of typical data collection methods; and 4) sample data collection tools. Users of this toolkit are encouraged to work with your organization's evaluation staff or evaluation consultants to work out details concerning specific evaluation methods – including the nuts and bolts of identifying samples of participants, collecting data, analyzing data, and developing reports of evaluation work.

Evaluation Approaches	Formative Evaluation – for Designing and Developing Your Dissemination Strategies, Products and Materials
Example Evaluation Questions About Dissemination	• What are the special education and disability topic, information, and resource needs of our different target audiences? • What types of dissemination strategies do our target audience members prefer? • Which strategies will most broadly and effectively reach our audiences? • What feedback do our target audiences have about our resources and dissemination methods?
Evaluation Methods You Could Use To Answer Your Evaluation Questions	➤ Interviews ➤ Focus groups ➤ Brief surveys ➤ Feedback forms included on your dissemination products

Why Evaluate Dissemination?

Why evaluate your dissemination work? Here are a few good reasons:

- **To determine how well your project's dissemination objectives –** perhaps already outlined in your OSEP grant's project plan **– are being achieved**;
- **To identify strengths and areas needing improvement in your dissemination strategies,** including strategies focused on specific information, resources, and materials being disseminated;
- **To better meet the information and resource needs of your target audiences**;
- **To improve your staff's skills to effectively disseminate**; and
- **To meet your OSEP grant and contract requirements**.

| **Process Evaluation –** for Monitoring and Assessing Implementation of Your Dissemination Strategies, Products, and Materials	**Summative Evaluation –** for Assessing Outcomes and Results from Dissemination Strategies, Products, and Materials
• How well are we achieving our dissemination plan objectives? • Are we adequately reaching our target audience members with different dissemination strategies? • How do our target audiences rate the quality and relevance of materials and products we disseminate?	• In what ways have our dissemination strategies and products benefited target audiences? • In what ways have consumers of our dissemination work directly applied and used our information and resources in their professional or personal lives?
➤ Website analytics ➤ Electronic newsletter, web-based analytics ➤ Social media analytics ➤ Project progress reports ➤ Interviews ➤ Surveys ➤ Feedback forms included on dissemination products	➤ Surveys ➤ Interviews ➤ Feedback forms
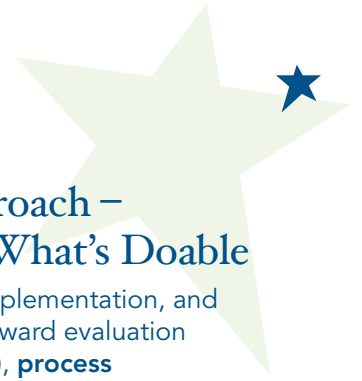
A Dissemination Evaluation Approach –
Focus on What's Important and What's Doable

To evaluate and assess target audience needs, implementation, and outcomes, your project can use a fairly straightforward evaluation approach involving **formative** (needs assessment), **process** (implementation and operations) and **summative** (benefits and outcomes) evaluation.

Often it makes sense to start with **formative evaluation**, especially if your project is in the initial stages of its dissemination activities, or implementing a new dissemination strategy, launching a new product, or involving a new target group. But formative evaluation can also be used to gather feedback about target audience needs with established dissemination activities. Such feedback can help you develop new or revise existing dissemination strategies and products.

Process evaluation is great for keeping track and getting feedback about whether or not your dissemination methods are operating as you intended, and the extent to which information and products are reaching your intended audience(s).

Summative evaluation is typically used once you have done a good job of finding out about the needs of your target audience and have dissemination strategies in place and products that are operating and being implemented as you had hoped. At this point, you may want to use summative evaluation to see if users are using and benefiting from your dissemination strategies.

While in some ways each of these three evaluation approaches is different, each approach informs the others, and they can be used to build on one another. For example, while conducting **process evaluation** to assess implementation of your dissemination strategies, you might receive some informal and useful feedback, from target audiences, about specific products and materials – feedback that may speak to their information needs. You'd probably want to use this feedback to make tweaks and improvements to your dissemination strategies and products (thus – you gathered some good **formative evaluation** data while also conducting process evaluation). **Summative evaluation** results, about the extent to which target audience members used your materials, might also give you good information for updating and revising products and materials – if, for example, you found out that your audience is not using a particular resource, you might want to figure out what changes might make it more useful. In such a case, you collected some good **formative evaluation** information while also gathering useful outcome, or summative, evaluation data.

The charts on pages 2 and 3 highlight some typical formative, process and summative evaluation questions you might have about your dissemination work, and we've shown how these questions could be answered by linking them to data and information sources, and to some typical data collection methods.

This can be kept simple, and it's very likely that your TA & D project is already using some of these approaches. You may already have in place some data collection strategies as part of your dissemination vehicles, for instance, feedback forms linked on your project website, or on Communities of Practice web pages. You might also already be receiving feedback provided to your staffers who implement the dissemination work (e.g., those who provide a 1-800 call-in service, technical assistance providers, training staff).

Formative Evaluation

Formative evaluation can help you develop, design and make improvements to your dissemination efforts. You might, for example, want to make changes or updates to products or materials on specific special education and disability topics; or create new materials; or even find out how you could make some improvements to the current ways you send out information and resources.

More specifically, formative evaluation can be used for:

Needs assessment – this involves finding out, in a systematic way, about the information and resource needs of your target audience groups – as well as the dissemination strategies (e.g., website, trainings and workshops) that are likely to best meet those needs. You might, for example, want to know more about the types of web-based and print resources parents need to better understand the types of school programs most appropriate for their children with autism; or about how a toolkit should be designed to help parents effectively navigate the IEP process; or what the essential content should include in an on-line Response to Intervention training module for special education teachers.

Target audiences typically include the end users or consumers of your dissemination strategies and materials. For TA & D projects, these audiences (who are the direct recipients of dissemination) are often State Education Agency staff, district and school administrators, early childhood educators, teachers, and families of students with disabilities. However, your audiences could also include intermediaries such as other TA & D projects who can help to link your dissemination work to end users and consumers. And don't forget that other partners, including your project's advisory group, can provide helpful input about target audience needs.
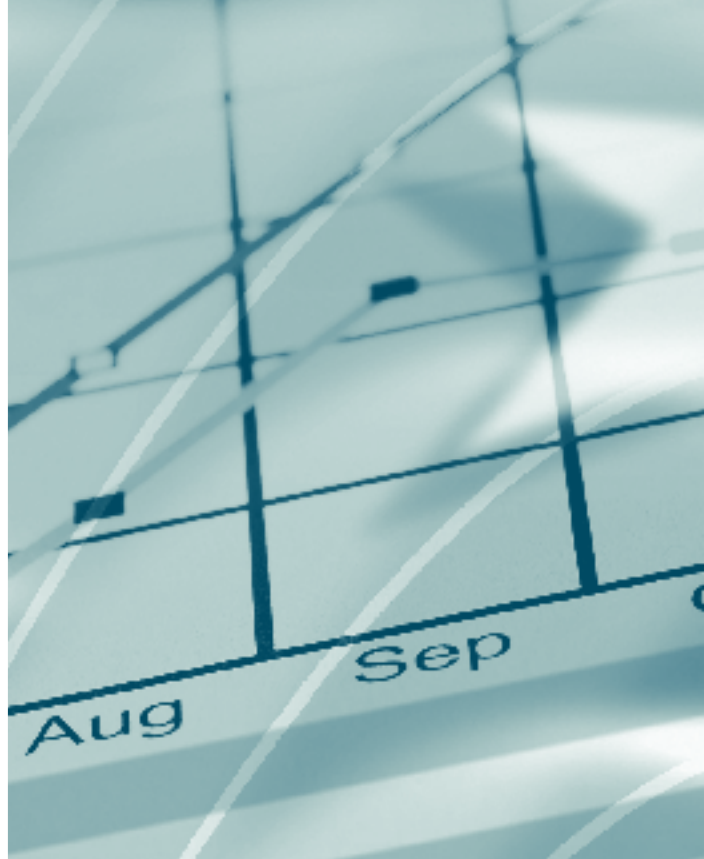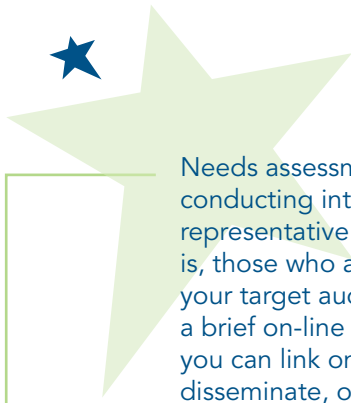
Needs assessment information can be obtained in a number of ways, including conducting interviews or focus groups with a small sample of persons who are representative or "typical" of your target audience group, or with "key informants," that is, those who are really well informed about topics and issues of concern to you and your target audiences. Less time-intensive methods to gather feedback include posting a brief on-line questionnaire via Survey Monkey, Zoomerang, Constant Contact, etc. that you can link on your project's website, within project newsletters, attach to products you disseminate, or send out at the conclusion of workshops and presentations.

Assessing the feasibility of your dissemination plan and specific dissemination methods and materials: Once you have a good understanding of the information, resource and training needs of your target groups, you will probably want to develop or make adjustments to your dissemination plan. Formative evaluation can be used to gather input and guidance – from target audience members, advisory group members, OSEP staff, or staff from other TA & D Network projects – about the feasibility, quality, relevance, and likely effectiveness of your dissemination plan and strategies.

Content review: In this strategy, representative or "typical" target audience members or key informants review and provide feedback on your dissemination plan, strategies, materials, and products to ensure that these are appropriate, relevant, of high quality, and likely to be useful and effective. For example, a small group of special education high school teachers could provide input on a draft webinar design (including the learning objectives, topics, content, and presentation format) on dropout prevention strategies for students with disabilities. Or, experts from each of OSEP's Regional and National Parent TA Centers could provide feedback on an updated fact sheet regarding parents' rights under IDEA and other federal disability legislation.

Pilot testing: This involves having a few target audience members – and ideally those that you believe are representative or "typical" of the larger group – participate in a "trial run" of one of your dissemination strategies – such as a webinar, workshop, on-line module, or toolkit. Pilot test participants could provide comments about their experience using a toolkit or other dissemination product, as well as about its relevance, quality, and potential usefulness. You can use pilot test feedback to tweak and refine your dissemination strategies or products, before taking them to scale for your broader target audience group.

Process Evaluation

Process Evaluation can help you document, monitor, and assess the implementation, operations, and progress of your dissemination work. With process evaluation, TA & D projects can monitor their progress in achieving dissemination objectives, tasks and activities.

TA & D projects can document the **what** and the **how** about dissemination tasks, and the extent to which target audiences were reached, and if they found what you disseminated to be of high quality, relevant to their professional or personal lives, and potentially useful.

Process evaluation can help TA & D project staff to:

- stay focused on dissemination plans;
- periodically check-in about progress in completing dissemination tasks;
- determine which dissemination strategies and materials might benefit from tweaking and improvements;
- identify factors that are supportive (e.g., collaboration with other TA & D projects) as well as possible barriers to completing activities (e.g., low income parents without internet access); and
- adjust dissemination work, as needed.

With process evaluation, you might want to look at key indicators about the amount and type of web traffic your project is getting, as well as some feedback from website users about the quality of your website resources. Social media (Facebook, Twitter) indicators (e.g., postings, followers) should be considered. You could look at the reach of newsletters or other materials you use to disseminate information and resources by tracking the number and type of target audience members that received and then actually "opened" your internet-based products. You might want to get feedback regarding the quality and relevance of information, products, and resources that were disseminated. And perhaps, most importantly, think about collecting measures to track change over time. For example, you might want to know to what extent your dissemination reach has been sustained or even increased over time, and whether such changes seem related to making adjustments or enhancements to your dissemination strategies.

In addition, process evaluation can be used to:

Monitor progress in completing plans and conducting dissemination strategies such as trainings, workshops and webinars. TA & D projects might find it helpful to use a "process" tool to guide their work in planning and conducting more complex dissemination events such as trainings or workshops that involve specific learning objectives, multiple topics and sessions, and several presenters. Such a tool could help to monitor: 1) development of the agenda, workshop design, session content, and resources; 2) the participant recruitment procedures and progress; 3) actual participation rates (i.e., the number and types of target audience groups who attended); and 4) process-oriented feedback from participants (e.g., their assessments about the quality, relevance and potential usefulness of sessions they attended).

Document, track and conduct trend analyses on the reach to specific target audience groups of specific dissemination strategies. For example, parent centers might want to keep track of the number of fact sheets on specific topics (e.g., parent role in the IEP process; resources on autism) that are accessed on their project websites, distributed as paper copies at parent workshops, or sent out via regular mail. These types of process data could be tracked and documented in comparable time periods (e.g., monthly, quarterly) to provide an assessment of trends over time.

Assess how well the procedures and processes used in joint OSEP project dissemination efforts are working. For example, the Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) could monitor and assess their work in developing tools and resources about student performance and achievement measures for State Education Agency (SEA) staff. This assessment could focus on ensuring that input from a representative sample of SEA staff was obtained regarding how the tools and resources were used, e.g., development of policies, program guidance to school districts and schools, in trainings and presentations; as well as suggestions for modifying and improving the tools, and development of additional, related resources.
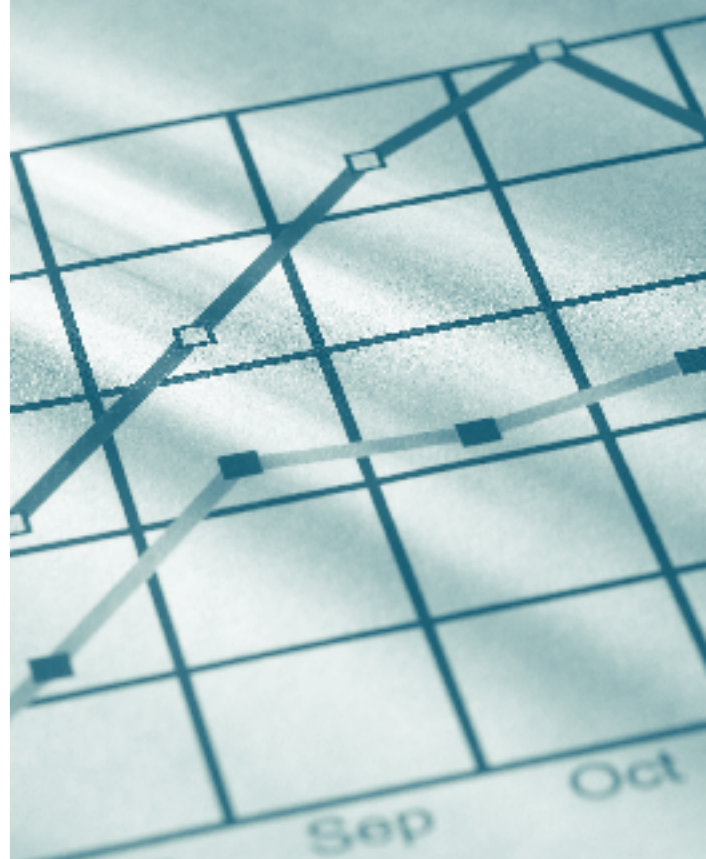
Summative Evaluation

Summative evaluation can help you determine outcomes and longer-term benefits of your dissemination efforts. Outcomes generally have to do with target audience reports of how they benefited and used what you disseminated to them.

Here are a few examples to illustrate. You might want to know:

- How teachers benefited and used what they learned from an on-line module about differentiated instruction featured on your project's website.
- How parents used one of your project's information tools about the family's roles and rights in the IEP process to get better services for their child.
- If there was a strengthening of partnerships and collaboration with other TA & D projects in conducting joint dissemination activities.

You could also look at the extent to which direct recipients of your project's dissemination work engaged in their own dissemination (i.e., to others) with your materials. This could be a good outcome indicator that dissemination efforts are having a broader effect, beyond your project's more immediate and direct audiences.

Summative evaluation usually focuses more on using quantitative measures rather than qualitative measures, which facilitate collecting more precise information about people's behaviors and actions they took.

Summative evaluation can be a complicated and expensive undertaking, especially if a high degree of research rigor is desired. Rigorous summative evaluations seek to establish impacts of programs or interventions – i.e., that the program or intervention was the direct cause of impacts. Demonstrating these types of impacts generally requires sophisticated research methods including random assignment of those receiving the program to those that did not, comparison groups, large numbers of individuals to participate in the research, and high-level statistical analyses. Most TA & D projects do not have the financial or personnel resources to plan and conduct rigorous impact type studies. However, there are some less rigorous evaluation approaches which can yield potentially useful information to TA & D projects about the possible benefits and outcomes of their dissemination work.

Outcomes are typically categorized as short-term, intermediate, and long-term. TA & D projects may want to focus summative evaluation work on the short-term and intermediate outcomes, especially if resources for evaluation are limited. The chart below gives some examples of short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals for two different user groups:

| Types of outcomes	Special education teacher examples	Parent examples
Short-term outcomes are concerned with the immediate benefits and effects of your dissemination work, such as changes in knowledge, awareness, beliefs, and attitudes.	First year special education teachers increase their knowledge, awareness and skills about the instructional needs of students with learning disabilities, from an on-line module developed by your project.	Parents of children with autism gain knowledge from your project website resources about parenting techniques and skills to use with their child.
Intermediate outcomes are more concerned with benefits and effects that usually take longer to occur and are often related to behavior change or specific actions that a person takes.	First year special education teachers apply the knowledge and skills they acquired, from your on-line module, by providing high quality instruction to their current class of students with LD.	Parents apply the knowledge and skills consistently and effectively to improve child behavior and family relationships.
Long-term outcomes are generally about the broader and sustained effects and benefits, and follow logically from the short-term and intermediate outcomes.	Special education teachers demonstrate ongoing capacity and increasing skill development over successive school years to deliver effective instruction to students with LD.	Parenting skills and improvements in family relationships contribute to greater school success for their child.

Data Collection Methods

A number of different data collection methods can be used with formative, process and summative evaluation approaches. This section provides brief descriptions of some of the typical methods, especially by highlighting pointers about how to use the methods, some advantages and possible disadvantages for each. In addition, we also provide some sample data collection tools, which you can customize for your own needs.

Record Keeping with Databases

Electronic databases can be used to track the number and type of target audience members (e.g., persons with disabilities, parents, teachers, other TA & D project staff) who access and participate in your dissemination methods and venues. You may find it useful to track and look at trends in the number and different types of end users who call your staff for information and technical assistance, visit your website, or read your e-newsletters. You could also maintain records of the specific types of information and topics (e.g., information on student assessment accommodations), that is directly requested of your staff; the topics, specific "pages", and other features visited or accessed on your project's website.

For example, the National Dissemination Center uses SalesForce to track information calls and emails. This database is used for a variety of purposes, including to create project progress reports, content-specific mailing lists, and to analyze staff workloads. Here is a snapshot of a report menu:
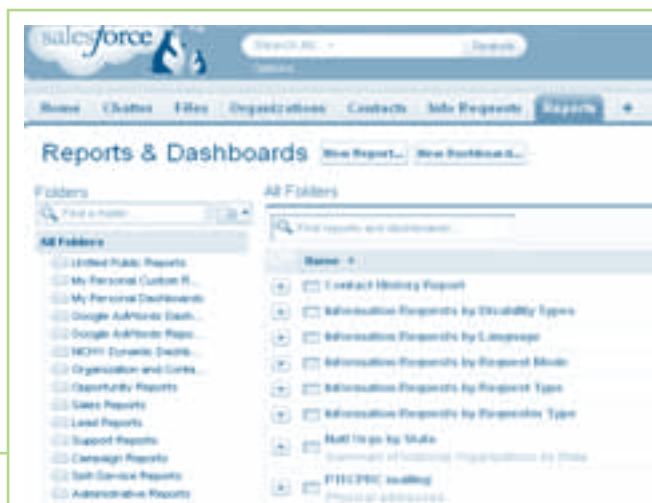
Website Analytics

Web analytics involve the collection, measurement, analysis, and reporting of internet data related to your project's website for purposes of understanding and optimizing web usage by your target audience. Web analytics programs can provide a range of data, in particular on number of total website visits, "unique" or "new" visitors, average length of time visitors spend on your website, which web pages and areas were viewed, and which website materials were downloaded and printed. These types of data can be aggregated and analyzed in comparable periods (such as monthly or quarterly) to give you good information about trends over time.

Web analytics applications can help TA & D projects measure the popularity of different features of their websites, and how traffic to their websites change after the launch of a new website feature or product. A couple of examples of how web use data could be presented are shown below.

Focus Groups

Focus groups can be a useful evaluation method for collecting qualitative data from group discussions. Focus groups are usually composed of individuals who are similar to one another on one or more factors of importance (e.g., parents of children with learning disabilities; high school special education teachers). Ideally, participants should be "typical" or representative or key informants of the broader target audience you want to learn from. However, focus group findings cannot really be generalized to the larger target population.

Focus groups are most effectively used when planning and designing program activities, conducting needs assessments, and obtaining information about experiences that individuals have with your program activities and dissemination efforts.

In a focus group, a moderator follows a predetermined guide to direct a discussion among 5-10 people with the purpose of collecting in-depth qualitative information about the group members' perceptions, attitudes, opinions and suggestions, experiences, and resource needs on a defined topic or issue. Focus groups obtain data with open-ended questions, in which participants influence and are influenced by the discussion within the group.

Focus groups are structured with an interview protocol or questioning route, in which questions are arranged in a natural and logical sequence. Often, the beginning section of the protocol is intentionally broad and less structured, with a goal of learning about participants' general perspectives. The middle section of the protocol is usually more structured, with the goal of addressing the topics more systematically. The final section tends to be narrower and is usually the most structured.

It is usually advisable to conduct more than one focus group to learn about a topic; two or more groups may be needed to ensure that a full spectrum of views and opinions is obtained.

Advantages.

- Can provide insights about what participants think, as well as *why* they think it.
- Can reveal consensus and diversity about participants' needs, preferences, assumptions, and experiences.
- Allows for group interaction such that participants are able to build on each other's ideas and comments which can provide an in-depth view not attainable from questioning individuals one at a time.
- Unexpected comments and perspectives can often be explored easily.
- Can often be planned and organized more quickly, and produce information faster, than some other evaluation techniques – especially telephone and mailed questionnaires.
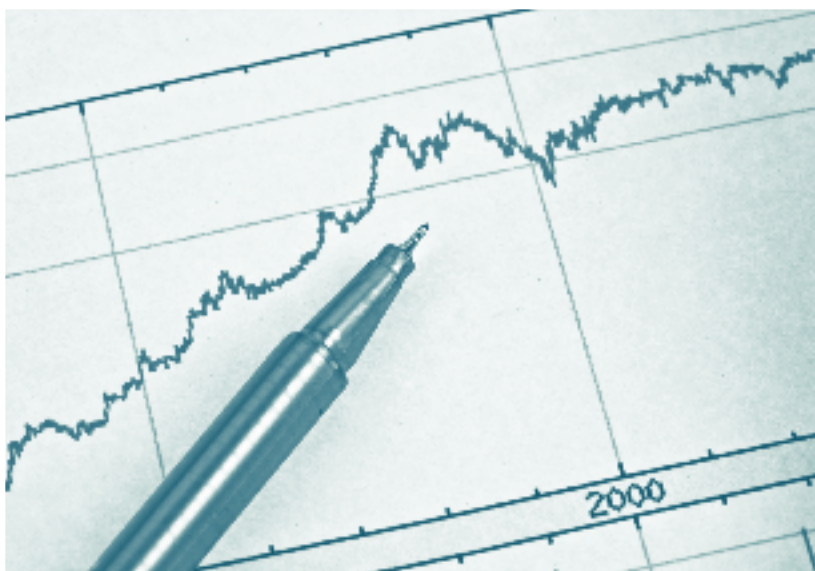
Disadvantages.

- Samples of participants are typically small and thus may not be very representative of the larger target audience.
- The logistics of gathering participants together in one place at the same time may be challenging and somewhat costly.
- More outspoken individuals can dominate the discussion, making viewpoints and contributions from less assertive participants difficult to assess.
- The quality of the discussion and the usefulness of information depend much on the skills of the moderator. The moderator's job is to both encourage discussion and maintain focus. Too much moderator control may result in not obtaining participants' input and perspectives, while too little control may result in the discussion veering off topic.
- Can generate a large amount of qualitative data which can be difficult, complicated and resource demanding to analyze.
- Analysis of the data collected may be more open to subjective, biased interpretation than is the case with quantitative data.

Guidelines.

- Select participants who represent the target population, and who are comparable or somewhat similar on important demographic characteristics. For example, you might design a focus group to include only elementary school special education teachers to provide input and perspectives about their professional development needs. Or, you might want to conduct a focus group of parents of children with autism to identify effective ways to disseminate resources to them. Homogeneous groups can really help to create a sense of comfort, trust and compatibility among participants – and thus provide more useful input.
- Limit the group size to between 5-10 individuals. This size generally facilitates opportunities for all to participate, while also providing diversity of input. Consider a smaller group when you need to obtain more depth and detail, or if participants are very involved with a topic and will likely have a lot to contribute.
- Sometimes project staff may want to conduct multiple focus groups in order to obtain adequate input and perspectives to answer key evaluation questions. Conducting a single focus group is often not sufficient; at minimum, a second group should be conducted to check on the consistency of findings obtained from the first group.
- The focus group protocol should comprise a mix of general and more specific questions. If questions are too general, participants' responses may not be adequately detailed, clear or useful. On the other hand, if questions are too specific, responses may not provide enough information about the main topics of interest. Follow-up probes for most focus group questions are often needed to clarify a question and have participants elaborate on their responses.
- Select a moderator who has good group processing and interpersonal skills, and who reflects a non-judgmental approach. Usually, a moderator should represent the demographics of the participants; for example, a focus group of parents of children with severe cognitive disabilities should probably be moderated by another parent with a child with similar disabilities.
- Digital or tape recording (either audio or video) is often used as the primary source of focus group data collection. However, recording can add significant costs (e.g., transcription service) and personnel time (e.g., detailed review and analysis of lengthy transcripts). As an alternative to digital or tape recording, an individual could serve as an observer and recorder, making sure to capture with detailed notes the comments and input provided during the discussion.

Interviews

Interviews are an effective method for collecting in-depth information about specific topics, issues, and target audience needs; as well as their experiences and benefits they've attained from your dissemination activities. The interviewer can explain and clarify questions, and probe by asking additional questions, to increase the likelihood of obtaining useful responses. Interviews are generally conducted either in person or by phone.

The format of interviews can be very structured, semi-structured, or even fairly unstructured. If straightforward, factual information is sought, a very structured approach is best – a set of pre-determined questions is generally used, and some of the questions may elicit both quantitative and qualitative responses. But if more complex or even somewhat elusive questions are being raised, a more unstructured approach should be used. In a more unstructured approach, the interviewer may rely less on a pre-determined set of questions, but rather pose questions based on how the interview discussion evolves. It may be advisable to use a semi-structured approach in which a core set of interview questions is used from which to branch off to less structured questions, to explore responses in greater depth.

Interviews can be a viable alternative or adjunct to a quantitative survey. As an adjunct, interviews can be used to explore an issue or problem area about which insufficient information exists, or from which a more extensive survey could be conducted later. Interviews could also be used after data have been collected from a survey for the purpose of exploring specific survey results in more detail and greater depth.

An interview guide comprising a list of topics and questions should be developed. Probes for many interview questions may be needed to ensure that adequate and full information is obtained. Interviews should start with noncontroversial issues. Questions can then be posed about individuals' experiences, opinions, and perceptions.

Advantages.

- Can be very personalized.
- Allow respondents to freely provide information, and reveal opinions and attitudes.
- Are flexible and adaptable. Interviewer can add probes to questions, pursue topics in greater depth, and gather more in-depth information about needs and concerns, than is usually the case with a self-administered survey.
- Interviewer can observe and record nonverbal behaviors, including respondent's gestures and tone of voice.
- Are appropriate to use with persons with certain disabilities (e.g., visual impairments) or with persons with limited literacy.

Disadvantages.

- Samples for interviews are usually small, and smaller samples may not be adequately representative of the larger target audience group.
- Can be more expensive than other methods (e.g., on-line surveys); especially if persons need to be trained in conducting interviews or interview consultants have to be hired.
- May be more time consuming to implement than self-administered surveys. Scheduling with interviewees may prove cumbersome and difficult.
- May be difficult to accurately capture and record interviewee responses, unless using a recording device.
- Results from open-ended or unstructured interviews may prove challenging and time consuming to interpret and summarize.
- Respondents may not accurately or honestly answer questions they find sensitive, awkward, or performance-oriented; and may be hesitant to reveal their true opinions or attitudes.

Guidelines.

- When conducting interviews ensure that the process is kept focused on the main purpose – avoid allowing the interview process to veer into tangential or unrelated topics and issues.
- Pilot test the interview protocol to make any necessary changes or improvements to the wording, sequence, and format of questions and topics.
- Use staff that are adequately trained in conducting interviews – individuals who are skilled at facilitating dialogue, have good "people" skills, and can conduct the interview discussion in an objective, non-judgmental manner.
- Consider tape-recording interviews to ensure that all information is captured and can be reviewed. If tape recording is not feasible, consider conducting the interviews with both an interviewer and note taker.
- Telephone interviews should be considered, in contrast to face-to-face interviews, if cost is an issue.

Abbreviated Example of a Parent Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The main purpose of this interview is to gather information about your information and resource needs as a parent with a child with disabilities. We are conducting interviews with many parents as part of an overall evaluation of our project, which is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs. Your responses to the interview will be helpful to us in making any needed improvements to the information, resources and products we provide to parents.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and information you provide is completely confidential. We will summarize results of the interviews, from all the parents we speak with, in reports, but will not disclose your name. We do not anticipate that there are any risks to you if you decide to participate in this interview.

We would like to audiotape this interview, with your permission, so that we can more accurately compile and analyze information you and other parents provide. Is it okay with you if we audiotape the interview?

- *Please briefly tell us about your child (children) with disabilities. What disabilities has your child (children) been identified with? What is his/her age? What types of school program and services does your child (children) receive?*

- *What specific issues and topics related to disabilities are particularly important to you?*

- *What types of information and resources have you found most useful?*

  - *Describe what has made these resources useful. For example, what about the content and types of information, amount of information and detail, and presentation format?*

  - *What preferences do you have about how you receive or access information and resources, for example, through connecting directly with experts, personal or professional contacts, newsletters, websites, etc.? Tell us a little about how you have used information received in these different ways? And what suggestions do you have about how information and resources can best be provided to you in these different ways?*

  - *From your perspective, are there specific gaps in parent-friendly disability and special education information and resources? If so, how would you like these gaps to be addressed?*

*Thank you very much for participating in this interview.
Your input is valuable to us.*

Surveys

Surveys are a useful tool for collecting more quantitative data (e.g., numerical counts, frequencies, percentages). Surveys can be a good method for collecting data about needs, experiences with program implementation, as well as outcomes – including how target audiences have benefited and used information and resources disseminated to them. Surveys are also useful in assessing attitudes, decisions that participants have made, behaviors and practices, lifestyle choices, affiliations (e.g., with disability groups), and demographics (e.g., specific disabilities). Surveys are often used with larger number of participants than is the case with focus groups or individual interviews. For example, surveys can more easily be fielded to hundreds or even thousands of persons (via websites, email links to SurveyMonkey) in one or more of your target audience groups, in an effort to get larger and even representative samples – and at potentially lower costs than conducting numerous interviews or focus groups.

Surveys can be conducted via regular mail, telephone, face-to-face, email, and the web. While web-based surveys have become increasingly popular, they may result in lower response rates that face-to-face and telephone surveys. Nevertheless, web surveys can be less costly than other survey approaches, but are limited to those with internet access.

Surveys are also a good evaluation method for establishing baselines against which future comparisons can be made and to analyze trends across time (e.g., compare the information needs of parent support groups from year to year; identify changes that may have occurred in the instructional practices of teachers who participated in a training).

Advantages.

- Can be fairly easy to administer – in person, on-line, via email.
- May be less expensive and demanding on personnel resources than other methods such as interviews or focus groups.
- Can be administered to large numbers of persons, and particularly useful in situations when persons are geographically dispersed.
- A great deal of information can be gathered in a relatively short period of time, and survey data can be aggregated and analyzed by computer processing.
- Can eliminate or greatly minimize the potential for sidetracking or collection of less relevant information than can occur in other, more interactive methods (e.g., interviews and focus groups).
- May be viewed by respondents as a much more confidential data collection process (compared to interviews and focus groups), thus encouraging respondents to provide more accurate and honest responses.

Disadvantages.

- The survey development process can be complex and time consuming, especially if there is need to collect a substantial amount of information.
- If a survey is very short, it may not elicit much useful information. If it is too lengthy, respondents may not take the time to complete the entire survey.
- There may be a lack of assurance that the survey questions or items were accurately understood by participants; however, pilot testing can help to alleviate this potential problem.
- Responses to open-ended questions may be difficult and time consuming to analyze and summarize.
- Low participation rates can result in a non-representative response rate, thus compromising interpretation of findings and use of results.

- Use structured questions, with fixed-choice response options, rather than unstructured or open-ended ones in order to obtain uniformity and consistency in responses; this will assist in the analysis of survey responses. Where appropriate, supplement structured questions with open-ended ones to obtain more "in-depth" responses.

- When developing survey questions and items, the following should be considered: 1) clarity is essential; avoid ambiguous items and wording; 2) shorter, more concise items are preferable to longer items as they are usually easier to understand; 3) avoid "double-barreled" items, which require the participants to respond to two or more separate ideas with a single answer; 4) avoid highly technical terms or jargon; and 5) avoid biased or leading questions.

- Pilot test the survey, with a small sample of individuals, to eliminate ambiguous or biased items, improve sequencing of questions and items, improve format, and ensure that overall length is appropriate.

- Provide respondents with introductory language, either written or verbal, with the purpose of the survey and assurance of confidentiality regarding their participation and the information they provide.

- With "regular" mail surveys, include a self-addressed, stamped return envelope to boost response rates.

- One or more follow-up reminders to participants are usually needed to increase response rates.

- If possible, provide an incentive (e.g., free materials, small amount of money) to participants to boost return rates.

- Consider complementing the survey method with a qualitative method (e.g., interviews, focus groups) for the purpose of obtaining more "in-depth" information on topics covered in the survey.

Abbreviated Example of a Target Audience Website Survey

Recently you visited our project website. Our project provides information and resources on disabilities and special education. We would like to ask you to spend about 5-10 minutes answering a few questions about your experience on our website. Your responses to this questionnaire are completely confidential and will not be disclosed to others. Data from individual responses will be combined with many others to produce reports.

This questionnaire data collection, supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, is intended to assist our project in obtaining information from which to improve services. If you have questions about this data collection, please contact [person's name] at [phone number] or at [person's email address].

1. **What type of information were you looking for on our website, today or on any previous visits to the website?** *(Check all that apply)*

    Information about….

    ☐ My own disability
    ☐ A family member's disability
    ☐ The disability of a person who's not a family member
    ☐ Early intervention services
    ☐ Special education

    ☐ Adult services for persons with disabilities
    ☐ Disability laws (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
    ☐ Resources in my state
    ☐ Cannot remember
    ☐ Other; please specify _____

2. **Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about the information you obtained from our website, today and from any previous visits to the website.**

The information was/is…	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable/ Not sure
a. easy to access	⑤	④	③	②	①
b. easy to understand	⑤	④	③	②	①
c. relevant to an issue, need or concern I have	⑤	④	③	②	①
d. useful and applicable within my professional and/or personal life	⑤	④	③	②	①
e. of high quality	⑤	④	③	②	①
f. informative about resources available to address my needs	⑤	④	③	②	①
g. informative about where to go for more or different types of information	⑤	④	③	②	①

3. Have you made use of the information or resources from our website (e.g., from past visits to the website)? *(Check only one response)*

- ☐ Yes (go to Q4)
- ☐ Not yet, but I still intend to do so (go to Q6)
- ☐ No, and I don't intend to use the information (go to Q7)

4. If yes, please indicate how you have used information or resources from our website *(Check all that apply)*

- ☐ I've used it in my personal life.
- ☐ I've shared/used it with my family members
- ☐ I've shared/used it with those who provide education and/or services to me or a family member
- ☐ I've used it my professional work
- ☐ I've shared it with professional colleagues

4a. Briefly describe how you <u>used</u> the information you found on our website:

_____

5. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. Please select "Not applicable" if an item does not apply to you (e.g., you are not a parent of a child with a disability).

Because of the information/resources I found on the website, I have….	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable/ Not sure
a. Learned more about specific disabilities or disability topics.	⑤	④	③	②	①
b. (Parents) Been more able to help my child with schoolwork.	⑤	④	③	②	①
c. (Parents) Been more able to help my child improve his/her behavior.	⑤	④	③	②	①
d. (Parent) Been more able to work with staff at my child's school.	⑤	④	③	②	①
e. (School staff) Provided better instruction or services to students.	⑤	④	③	②	①
f. (Administrators) Provided better programs for those with disabilities.	⑤	④	③	②	①

6. **If you** <u>intend to use</u> **the information from our website at some time in the future, how do you think you'll use it?** *(Check all that apply)*

☐ I'll use it in my personal life.
☐ I'll share/use it with my family members
☐ I'll share/use it with those who provide education and/or services to me or a family member
☐ I'll use it in my professional work
☐ I'll share it with professional colleagues
☐ Not sure

6a. **Briefly describe how you** <u>intend to use</u> **the information you found on our website:**

_____

7. **Please indicate your reason(s) for not intending to use the information (Check all that apply)**

☐ I didn't intend to find information for a specific use when I visited the website
☐ I don't know how to use the information I obtained
☐ I am waiting to see if I need to use the information I obtained
☐ I got more useful information from another source
☐ Other (please specify) _____

8. **How likely are you to visit our website again? (Check only one response)**

☐ Very likely
☐ Somewhat likely
☐ Somewhat unlikely
☐ Very unlikely
☐ Not sure

9. **How likely are you to use our website as your main stop for information on special education/ disabilities? (Check only one response)**

☐ Very likely
☐ Somewhat likely
☐ Somewhat unlikely
☐ Very unlikely
☐ Not sure

10. **Would you recommend our website to others who might benefit from information on special education/disabilities? (Check only one response)**

☐ Yes, definitely
☐ Yes, probably
☐ No, probably not
☐ No, definitely not

11. What suggestions, if any, do you have regarding changes, enhancements or improvements to our website?

Comment:_____

12. Which of the following best describe(s) you? (Check all that apply)

☐ 1. Early intervention provider (Birth to 2 yrs)
☐ 2. Preschool staff (3-5 yrs)
☐ 3. K-12 general education teacher
☐ 4. K-12 special education teacher
☐ 5. Related services provider (e.g., OT, PT, Reading Specialist, Counselor)
☐ 6. Education, other school personnel (e.g., Teachers Aide; paraprofessional)
☐ 7. K-12 student
☐ 8. School administrator
☐ 9. State education agency staff
☐ 10. Local education agency staff
☐ 11. Federal agency staff
☐ 12. Person with a disability
☐ 13. Parent/family member
☐ 14. Post-secondary education faculty
☐ 15. College/university student
☐ 16. Parent organization staff
☐ 17. Organization, disability
☐ 18. Other; please specify _____

13. Would you like to receive our monthly eNewsletter, which contains up-to-date information on issues and resources related to special education and disabilities? If so, please provide your email address below.

_____

**Thank you <u>very much</u> for responding to this questionnaire.
Your feedback is very important to us.**

Additional Resources

The following resources represent very program-friendly, inexpensive publications which can provide additional helpful information, guidance, and tools. Many are available from Sage Publications; its website is www.sagepub.com, and phone number is 1-800-818-7243.

Needs Assessments

Witkin, B. R., & Altschuld, J. W. (1995). *Planning and Conducting Needs Assessments: A Practical Guide*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Evaluation Design

Fitz-Gibbon, C.T., & Morris, L.L. (1987). *How to Design a Program Evaluation*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Mertens, D. M., & McLaughlin, J. A. (2004). *Research Methods in Special Education*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Sampling

Henry, G. T. (1990). *Practical sampling*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Process Evaluation

King, J.A., et al. (1987). *How to Assess Program Implementation*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Qualitative Methods

Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Surveys

Dillman, D. A. (2007). *Mail and Internet Surveys: The tailored design method*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, NY.

Fink, A., & Kosecoff, J. (2008). *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-step Guide*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Focus Groups

Krueger, R.A. (2008). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Analysis of Data

Fitz-Gibbon, C. T., & Morris, L.L. (1987). *How to Analyze Data*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
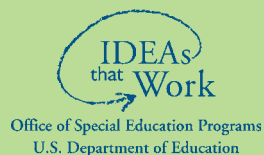
NICHCY

*National Dissemination Center
for Children with Disabilities*

1825 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington, DC 20009

1.800.695.0285 (Toll-free, Voice/TTY)
202.884.8200 (Voice/TTY)
202.884.8441 (Fax)

Email: nichcy@fhi360.org
Website in English: nichcy.org
Website in Spanish: nichcy.org/espanol/

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THE SCIENCE OF IMPROVING LIVES

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