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Resources available at CURA

Equipment

The following resources are available to CURA Research Assistants. Please contact CURA's executive assistant, Briana Chatters, at cura@umn.edu or 612-625-5090 to inquire about availability, reserve equipment and to get equipment specifics.

- Laptop computers
- Flash drives
- Projectors
- Flip chart and easel
- Digital camera
- Audio recorders
- Generic "CURA Research Assistant" business cards (list CURA's main desk phone and email)

GIS and Data Resources

Twin Cities and Metro Area

Datafinder from MetroGIS
http://www.datafinder.org/catalog/index.asp
One-stop shop for downloadable GIS files in over XX categories. For access to Parcel or Street Centerlines please contact Jeff Matson (jmatson@umn.edu) at CURA.

Met Council Basemaps and Map Gallery
http://gis.metc.state.mn.us/index.asp

Met Council Regional Statistics and Data
http://www.metrocouncil.org/metroarea/stats.htm

City of Minneapolis Census 2010
http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/census/2010.asp
Tables, reports and neighborhood profiles based on wide variety of Census data

City of Minneapolis Census 2000
http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/Census2000/
Tables, reports and neighborhood profiles based on wide variety of Census data

Community DataWorks (St. Paul)
http://www.communitydataworks.org/StPaul/index.php
District Council data profiles and downloadable GIS files based on 2000 Census Data from Wilder Research

MetroMSP
http://metromsp.zoomprospector.com/
Online mapping tool for business locations

Statewide

Minnesota 3D
http://map.deed.state.mn.us/chameleon/m3d4.phtml
Local online mapping application. Commuteshed, Laborshed maps and reports.

MnGEO
http://www.mngeo.state.mn.us/
New state geospatial office and data clearinghouse for Minnesota GIS data
Minnesota Compass

http://www.mncompass.org/
Wilder Research indicators project

MN DNR Data Deli
http://deli.dnr.state.mn.us/
Downloadable GIS data clearinghouse

Legislative GIS Office
http://www.gis.leg.mn/gis.html
Map and GIS data related to political boundaries

LMIC Aerial Imagery
http://www.mngeo.state.mn.us/chouse/wms/wms_image_server_description.html
Add high-resolution aerial imagery to ArcMAP

National

U.S. Census Bureau / American Community Survey
http://www.census.gov/
http://www.census.gov/acs/www/

American Factfinder
http://factfinder.census.gov
Downloadable Census tables

OnTheMap
http://lehdmap.did.census.gov/
National version of M3D, laborshed, commuteshed, worker/resident profiles.

For additional data sources or assistance with lists above please contact Jeff Matson at CURA, jmatson@umn.edu or 612-625-0081.

Contact list

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Methods: Best Practices

What is a best practice?

A technique, methodology, behavior or idea which through experience and research has reliably led to a desired or optimum result. Or "a search for apparently smart ideas embodied in practice" (Eugene Bardach).

Some notes on best practices

- The term "best" is misleading for several reasons:
  - Depends on who is defining "best," this varies by industry and community – be sure to explicitly talk with the client about what they think best is.
  - How can you be sure there is a link between the practice and the problem it's purported to address? Even if you have found some good effects perhaps the practice had little to do with them?
  - Often the research will turn up an equal (or greater) number of examples of what does not work
- When looking at a best practice (or "smart practice"), focus on the central aspect of its working, or the latent opportunity for creating value. This is the "free lunch" where you try to get something for nothing or as little as possible.
- A smart practice is made up of:
  - Latent opportunity for creating value
  - A mechanism for extracting and focusing that value
- As you characterize smart practices allow for variation and complexity. Smart practices are internally complex, context sensitive and can be used by different parties to pursue different goals.
- When you describe smart practice be generic and flexible not prescriptive and overly precise – look for the essential functions (the basic mechanisms, or the "how" or "logic" of the practice) don't get bogged down in the features (the implementing mechanisms). To make your analysis more robust, try to find multiple examples of smart practices using the same function.
- When characterizing smart practices look for generic vulnerabilities. These are basic weaknesses of the practice that are connected to its causal structure and may have the potential to cause it to fail in certain situations.
- No smart practices research is complete without considering the context. How can you use safeguarding and enhancement strategies to improve the smart practices chances?
- Manage client expectations and convey relevance, features, functions, feasibility, and limitations of practices

Further reading

Bardach, Eugene. (2004). *A practical guide for policy analysis: The eightfold path to more effective problem solving*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Methods: Focus Groups

What is a focus group?

Focus groups are a powerful means to evaluate services or test new ideas. Basically, focus groups are interviews, but of 6-10 people at the same time in the same group. One can get a great deal of information during a focus group session.

Some notes on focus groups

- Preparing for the Session
  - Identify the major objective of the meeting.
  - Carefully develop five to six questions (see below)
  - Plan your session (see below)
  - Call potential members to invite them to the meeting. Send them a follow-up invitation with a proposed agenda, session time and list of questions the group will discuss. Plan to provide a copy of the report from the session to each member and let them know you will do this.
  - About three days before the session, call each member to remind them to attend

- Developing Questions
  - Develop five to six questions—Session should last one to 1.5 hours -- in this time, one can ask at most five or six questions
  - Always first ask yourself what problem or need will be addressed by the information gathered during the session, e.g., examine if a new service or idea will work, further understand how a program is failing, etc.
  - Focus groups are basically multiple interviews. Therefore, many of the same guidelines for conducting focus groups are similar to conducting interviews

- Planning the Session
  - Scheduling—plan meetings to be one to 1.5 hours long. Over lunch seems to be a very good time for other to find time to attend.
  - Setting and Refreshments—hold sessions in a conference room, or other setting with adequate air flow and lighting. Configure chairs so that all members can see each other. Provide name tags for members, as well. Provide refreshments, especially box lunches if the session is held over lunch.
  - Ground Rules—it’s critical that all members participate as much as possible, yet the session move along while generating useful information. Because the session is often a one-time occurrence, it's useful to have a few, short ground rules that sustain participation, yet do so with focus. Consider the following three ground rules: a) keep focused, b) maintain momentum and c) get closure on questions.
  - Agenda—consider the following agenda: welcome, review of agenda, review of goal of the meeting, review of ground rules, introductions, questions and answers, wrap up.

- Membership—focus groups are usually conducted with 6-10 members who have some similar nature, e.g., similar age group, status in a program, etc. Select members who are likely to be participative and reflective. Attempt to select members who don't know each other.
- Plan to record the session with either an audio or audio-video recorder. Don't count on your memory. If this isn't practical, involve a co-facilitator who is there to take notes.

- Facilitating the Session
    - Major goal of facilitation is collecting useful information to meet goal of meeting
    - Introduce yourself and the co-facilitator, if used
    - Explain the means to record the session
    - Carry out the agenda (See "Agenda" above)
    - Carefully word each question before that question is addressed by the group. Allow the group a few minutes for each member to carefully record their answers. Then, facilitate discussion around the answers to each question, one at a time.
    - After each question is answered, carefully reflect back a summary of what you heard (the note taker may do this)
    - Ensure even participation. If one or two people are dominating the meeting, then call on others. Consider using a round- table approach, including going in one direction around the table, giving each person a minute to answer the question. If the domination persists, note it to the group and ask for ideas about how the participation can be increased.
    - Closing the session—tell members that they will receive a copy of the report generated from their answers, thank them for coming, and adjourn the meeting
- Immediately After Session
    - Verify if the tape recorder, if used, worked throughout the session
    - Make any notes on your written notes, e.g., to clarify any scratching, ensure pages are numbered; fill out any notes that don't make sense, etc.
    - Write down any observations made during the session. For example, where did the session occur and when, what was the nature of participation in the group? Were there any surprises during the session? Did the tape recorder break?

Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC.
http://managementhelp.org/evaluatn/focusgrp.htm

Further reading

Morgan, David L. (1988). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Krueger, Richard A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications

Methods: Interviews

What is an interview?

Interviews are used to collect information about a person's experiences. They are especially useful for gaining detailed, in-depth information.

Some notes on interviews

- Purpose/Value of interviews for community based research
  - Understanding context for research
  - Community perspectives on issue.
  - Qualitative data
- Identification of people for interviews
  - Ask the project supervisor
  - Ask at the end of interview if the respondent can suggest other people they think would be important to talk to.
- Obtaining interviews
  - Start scheduling right away - it can be challenging to arrange a convenient time for the interview.
  - Your supervisor should contact people he/she recommend to let them know you will be contacting them and why.
  - Follow-up with an email requesting an interview requesting the interview, the kinds of questions you want to discuss length, and possible dates.
  - Follow-up email next day or so with a phone call to schedule the interview. (Use the name of the person who recommended the interviewee)
- Interview protocol:
  - Protocol formality - varies depending on purpose of interview, e.g., qualitative data interviews will need to use the same questions asked in a consistent manner and assure confidentiality.
- Be professional
  - Create a friendly setting. Your task is to make the respondent to want to participate.
  - Establish the legitimacy of the research - be clear on the purpose of the interview and communicate it to respondent.
  - Prepare specific written questions to follow - review with supervisor and test for clarity and validity.
  - Practice interview questions.
  - Be neutral – do not reveal your own opinion about the questions or the answers given.
- Probes
  - Seek responses in terms of question asked – if you are not sure what the respondent is saying ask for clarification.
  - Certain responses may suggest probes – Respondent: I think this is an important issue". Interviewer: "What makes this issue important or for whom is this issue important?"

- Ethics and Confidentiality
    - Interviewees should know in advance what to expect and what you are going to do with the information they provide.
    - Have a plan in advance on how to document and store data.
    - Weigh issues in degree of confidentiality, e.g. sensitive or personal issues require confidentiality, but community observations may not. (Respondents will be more forthcoming if assured of confidentiality or anonymity.)
- Documentation
    - Take careful and complete notes – record answers accurately
    - Write up interview shortly after interview.
- Follow-up
    - Send thank you to acknowledge their time and contribution to your project.

Further reading

Lindlof, T.R., & Taylor, B.C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.

Methods: Literature Review

What is a literature review?

The format of a review of literature may vary from discipline to discipline and from assignment to assignment. A review may be a self-contained unit -- an end in itself -- or a preface to and rationale for engaging in primary research. A review is a required part of grant and research proposals and often a chapter in theses and dissertations. Generally, the purpose of a review is to analyze critically a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles.

Some notes on literature reviews

- Writing the introduction
    - Define or identify the general topic, issue, or area of concern, thus providing an appropriate context for reviewing the literature
    - Point out overall trends in what has been published about the topic; or conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence, and conclusions; or gaps in research and scholarship; or a single problem or new perspective of immediate interest
    - Establish the writer's reason (point of view) for reviewing the literature; explain the criteria to be used in analyzing and comparing literature and the organization of the review (sequence); and, when necessary, state why certain literature is or is not included (scope)
- Writing the body
    - Group research studies and other types of literature (reviews, theoretical articles, case studies, etc.) according to common denominators such as qualitative versus quantitative approaches, conclusions of authors, specific purpose or objective, chronology, etc.
    - Summarize individual studies or articles with as much or as little detail as each merits according to its comparative importance in the literature, remembering that space (length) denotes significance
    - Provide the reader with strong "umbrella" sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, "signposts" throughout, and brief "so what" summary sentences at intermediate points in the review to aid in understanding comparisons and analyses
- Writing the conclusion
    - Summarize major contributions of significant studies and articles to the body of knowledge under review, maintaining the focus established in the introduction
    - Evaluate the current "state of the art" for the body of knowledge reviewed, pointing out major methodological flaws or gaps in research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issues pertinent to future study
    - Conclude by providing some insight into the relationship between the central topic of the literature review and a larger area of study such as a discipline, a scientific endeavor, or a profession

The University of Wisconsin – Madison Writing Center
http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html

Further reading

"Literature reviews: An overview for graduate students": www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/lit-review

Methods: Surveys

What is a survey?

A survey is a tool to collect opinions and/or factual information from individuals. One method is a structured interview, where the researcher asks each respondent the questions. Another method is a questionnaire, where the respondent fills out the survey on his or her own.

Some notes on surveys

- Random sampling
    - Sample size for an entire community = 400 completed surveys; more for subsets
- Response rate
    - Rule of thumb: less than 1/3, throw it out; between 1/3 and 2/3, gray area; 2/3 or more, definitely useable
- Common problems
    - Community organization doesn't really want to hear from everyone—only people who care about the issues
    - Ignoring the survey work of others. It is often useful to repeat questions to see changes over time and/or compare different communities
    - Poor response rate
    - Results disliked and/or not used
    - Undermine community's credibility for future surveys by not reporting all results to community
- Method of data collection
    - Door-to-door survey (most labor-intensive, volunteers need training and supervision)
    - Telephone survey (moderately labor-intensive, volunteers need training and supervision)
    - Mailed survey (least labor-intensive, can use untrained volunteers, takes at least six weeks to collect data, need a good mailing list)
    - Personal drop-off and pick-up (variation on mailed survey, more personalized request for participation, can make people less likely to write negative comments)
- Procedures for a successful mailed survey
    - Send it out in at least three waves
        - Initial copy of survey, with cover letter and stamped return envelope, sent to entire sample
        - Reminder postcard, sent to entire sample. Send out one week after initial mailing.
        - Follow-up copy of survey, with cover letter and stamped return envelope, sent to all who have no returned initial survey. Send these out two weeks after postcard mailing.
    - Number entire sample—number each survey form before mailing, so that you can keep track of who has returned his or her form
    - Have three copies of mailing labels printed, in addition to one paper copy of the entire sample

Further reading

Salant, P., & Dillman, D.A. (1994). *How to conduct your own survey*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.