Collecting Client Feedback Data

Collecting appropriate client feedback data can influence organizational decision-making and enhance the quality of our programs. It can also help contribute to a culture of client responsiveness. This information guide discusses the importance of client consent in data collection and covers six key questions to ask yourself when choosing appropriate methods for collecting client feedback.

Programming is **client-responsive** when it is designed and implemented in a way that takes into account the views of our clients. This involves analyzing and incorporating **client feedback** to make informed decisions and take action.

Meaningful, Informed Consent

Meaningful, informed consent entails more than a client's signature on a form. The steps that we take for obtaining consent are crucial to safeguarding clients' dignity, autonomy, and well-being, especially when collecting data from vulnerable populations.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Assistance (META) Project's 5 Questions for Obtaining Meaningful Informed Consent walks through five questions to ask yourself when developing plans and procedures for obtaining meaningful informed consent. Also see META's Sample Informed Consent Form.

Types of Client Feedback Channels

There are three main types of client feedback channels:

- **Proactive:** channels used to actively solicit feedback from clients, such as surveys or focus group discussions.
- **Reactive:** safe channels through which clients can reach staff when they wish, such as suggestion boxes located in accessible places.
- **Open:** channels to collect the spontaneous feedback that clients share in the course of daily interactions, such as informal conversations during project activities.

Let's consider several questions that can help you choose appropriate data collection methods within these different channels.

Six Key Questions for Choosing Client Feedback Methods

1. **What do you need to learn and why?** (monitoring and evaluation questions)
2. **What type of information** do you need to answer these questions?
3. **Who** can provide this information?
4. **Which data collection methods** will enable you to collect this information?
5. **What human and financial resources** do you need to collect this data, and do you have them?
6. **What actions or decisions** could you take as a result of this client feedback data?

What do you need to learn and why?

Before collecting any data, it is critical to specifically define what you want to learn. You can start with broadly defining questions such as: "Are clients satisfied with our services?" From there, you can come up with clearly defined sub-questions. For example:

- Do clients feel our services are respectful and culturally appropriate?
- Do clients feel our services are useful?
- Do clients feel their voices are heard and that they have the ability to influence decisions?

These questions can be considered **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) questions**.

What type of data do you need to answer these questions?

You will need to decide whether you need quantitative data, qualitative data, or both types of data to answer your M&E questions.

Qualitative data measures what is being studied with words (such as observations, descriptions, and perceptions). It can explore opinions, feelings, and priorities and can often be used to answer broad questions like: "Why?" "How?" and "Under what circumstances?"

Quantitative data measures what is being studied with numbers (such as counts, ratios, percentages, and proportions). It can be used to answer more narrowly defined questions and can provide information about the nature, size and frequency of a problem.

Who can provide this information?

Once you know what you need to learn, identify the people you serve (or intend to serve) who can provide the needed information. Also consider whether you wish to consult non-clients, such as community members or partners. To help ensure you gather meaningful information for data analysis, you should plan to disaggregate your data by applicable variables such as age, sex, native language, education level, English language ability, etc.

What data collection methods will enable you to collect this information?

There are many types of data collection methods that may enable you to collect the information you need to answer your monitoring and evaluation questions.

The **Switchboard Resource Library** contains useful tools to help you learn how to choose appropriate data collection methods, including:

- *Quick Reference Table: Overview of Common Methods* – This table lists the pros and cons of common methods like surveys, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews.
- *Five Steps for Choosing Data Collection Methods* – This tip sheet goes into greater depth on how to answer five of the key questions introduced here.
- *Choosing Data Collection Methods* – This self-paced e-learning module covers this content in a short, interactive format.

In the context of client feedback data collection, take the time to carefully consider the implications of different dynamics that may be relevant. For instance, focus group discussions may be at risk of being overpowered by certain voices, while populations with low literacy levels will be excluded from self-administered text-based surveys. See META's Overview of Common Methods for a detailed look at the pros and cons of surveys, individual interviews, focus group discussions, and other methods.

What human and financial resources do you need to collect this data?

There is often a trade-off between rigor and financial cost. Consider the resources required to collect, manage, analyze and disseminate your data using the method you have chosen. M&E questions may need to be revised if they are too resource-intensive to answer effectively.

What actions or decisions could you take as a result of this client feedback data?

Before engaging in data collection, make sure that you have the ability to effectively use the results of client feedback in your program. This helps demonstrate that you respect clients' time and helps maintain trust. When clients provide feedback, you should aim to explain how their feedback was taken into account, what changes you were and were not able to implement, and the reasons behind these decisions.

Additional Resources

Feedback to Action: Strategies to improve the use of feedback in programmatic decision-making (2018) - This International Rescue Committee guide provides strategies that humanitarian agencies can adopt to improve the use of feedback in decision-making.

Switchboard's *Collecting Client Feedback Data* (2019) - This recorded webinar provided an overview of data collection methods such as surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews and presents a client feedback case study.

The IRC received $1,194,063 through competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant # 90RB0052. The project is financed with 100% of Federal funds and 0% by non-governmental sources. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.