## Sampling Methods Commonly Used in Program Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>What is it and how do you do it?</th>
<th>Situations when it might make sense to use this method</th>
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</table>
| **Random** | • Drawing a number of individuals from a larger group so that individuals in the group have the same chance of being selected.  
  • You have a list of all participants and then use a random number generator or random number table to select a smaller number of participants to be involved in the evaluation.  
  • There are three kinds of random sampling: “simple” (random draw from one list), “systematic” (select individuals based on a uniform interval, such as drawing every 20th name on a list), and “stratified” (split the original group of individuals into two or more separate groups based on a specific characteristic, such as grade level or gender, and then proceed with simple or systematic sampling for each sub-group) | • You have a large number of participants (100+) and limited resources for processing large volumes of data  
  • You have a list of participant names (or some other unique identifier)  
  • Your evaluation methods are very time-consuming for participants and those who are collecting the data (e.g.,  
    • You are doing an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design  
   • You have a large number of participants (100+) and limited resources for processing large volumes of data  
   • You are in any of the situations listed above for random sampling, but you do not have a list with names of individual participants. Instead, you have a list of groups of participants, such as classroom groups, schools, or training sessions. |
| **Cluster** | • Drawing a grouping (or “cluster”) from a larger population so that all clusters have the same chance of being selected.  
  • You have a list of groupings (“clusters”) of participants (such as classroom groups) and then use a random number generator or random number table to select a smaller number of clusters to be involved in the evaluation.  
  • There are two kinds of cluster sampling: simple or stratified (see definitions above) |  |
| **Purposive** | • Select “information rich” individuals based on specific criteria.  
  • You identify specific individuals who you think have particular knowledge or experience with a topic you are exploring or evaluating. | • You are doing key-informant interviews or focus group interviews  
  • You are seeking information from “key stakeholders” |
| **Convenience** | Participants are selected because they are conveniently available, such as handing out surveys in a waiting room or at an event. | • You don’t have a list of participants or potential respondents.  
  • You are seeking needs assessment information from the “general public” and cannot afford a randomized phone, mail, or online survey.  
  • There’s no other way to get the data. |
## Method

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<td><strong>Census</strong></td>
<td>Include all participants. For example, you ask all teachers in a training session to complete the post-training survey.</td>
<td>• “Captive audience” that is easy to access (such as surveying a classroom of students)</td>
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<td>(not a “sample”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Small number of participants (&lt;100) and/or good capacity and resources for processing data</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Using administrative data or other data that have already been collected</td>
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- Random and cluster sampling are “probability” methods, while purposive and convenience sampling are “non-probability” methods. Probability sampling means that individuals have an equal chance of being chosen (“drawn from the hat”), while non-probability sampling means that some individuals will be more likely be chosen than others—introducing more of an opportunity for bias.
- Probability sampling methods are more rigorous, while convenience sampling, in particular, is vulnerable to criticism.
- The census approach is well regarded if the response rate is adequate. (There is no hard-and-fast cut-off for what is considered an “adequate” response rate, but rates below 60% can be problematic and rates above 80% are desirable.)


For online sampling tools, go to:  
[www.random.org](http://www.random.org) (random number generator and list randomizer)  
[www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm](http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm) (sample size calculator)