`Tip Sheet`

Sampling Methods Commonly Used in Program Evaluation

Method	What is it and how do you do it?	Situations when it might make sense to use this method
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
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)	▪ 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.
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.

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Census (not a "sample")	Include all participants. For example, you ask all teachers in a training session to complete the post-training survey.	▪ "Captive audience" that is easy to access (such as surveying a classroom of students) ▪ Small number of participants (<100) and/or good capacity and resources for processing data ▪ Using administrative data or other data that have already been collected

- 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 a more detailed description of sampling methods, read:
Sampling. University of Wisconsin-Extension Evaluation Publications. http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Sampling-P1029C237.aspx

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