



DOCUMENT REVIEW

PURPOSE

To review a variety of existing sources (e.g., documents, reports, data files, and other written artifacts) with the intention of collecting independently verifiable data and information.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPLICATIONS

Many times the information required to complete a needs assessment has already been collected for other purposes. For example, similar data to what you are looking for may have been previously collected for generating other reports, papers, or research. Ministries, government agencies, NGOs, and other organizations often produce valuable reports that you can use to supplement your own data collection as part of your needs assessment. The *document review* process provides you with a systematic procedure for identifying, analyzing, and deriving useful information from these existing documents.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

ADVANTAGES

- Information contained in extant document(s) is independently verifiable.
- The document review process can be done independently, without needing to solicit extensive input from other sources.
- Document review is typically less expensive than collecting the data on your own.

DISADVANTAGES

- Information in the document(s) may represent a perspective that is not aligned with the needs assessment project.
- Data in the document source(s) may not be exactly what you want for the needs assessment.
- Obtaining and analyzing necessary documents can be a time consuming process.
- You are not able to control the quality of data being collected and must rely on the information provided in the document(s) to assess quality and usability of the source(s).

GENERAL PROCEDURES

1. From a list of information required to complete your needs assessment, identify those elements or indicators that may be contained in previously written reports, planning papers, research synopses, or other documents. For instance, if you require statistics on the population growth within a region in

order to complete your needs assessment you can identify several government (or potentially United Nations) reports that provide the necessary information. Both published and unpublished sources can be considered for inclusion, though the validity of unpublished materials can make your quality assurance efforts more difficult.

2. Consider developing a list of characteristics (or attributes) that you are looking for in an existing record. This can help you identify a comprehensive list of available resources. For example, do you only want to use data that was collected through internationally funded efforts, or do you only want information that has been published with full disclosure of the participants and methods used to collect the data.
3. For each item of required information that could potentially be found in an existing document, list three to five potential resources for attaining that information. For instance, imagine that your needs assessment will require information on the number of current employees within a Ministry of the Health who have the qualifications to provide training on environment impacts. In this case, you would want to determine which currently available Ministry documents may include this information, and where those documents might be located.
4. Identify the individual(s) who will be invited to participate in the document review.
5. Develop a document review protocol, checklist, or examination form that can be systematically used by each reviewer to ensure that valuable information is identified, analyzed, coded, and documented. Be sure to include space at the top of each protocol, checklist, or form for the reviewer to describe the document and where it stored if additional information is later required. In the protocol ensure that required information regarding both the current results and the desired results of the needs assessment are represented, along with the required information at each level of the program/project results chain.
6. Generate guidelines for using the protocol/checklist or examination form in the document review process. Consider providing a "positive example" of a completed review protocol/checklist or examination form, highlighting how information can be recorded on the form to maximize its clarity and usability in the needs assessment process.
7. As each document is reviewed, the reviewer(s) should complete the protocol, checklist, or examination form to verify that all useful information is documented.
8. When all of the relevant documents have been reviewed, all of the reviewers should meet to collectively document the findings of their reviews (i.e., what information has been collected through the document review process). In particular, the reviewers should identify specific instances where information from different documents may disagree, instances when multiple documents contain similar information, where additional information may be located, and what information may have to be collected directly through the needs assessment.
9. Collect the reviewers documented findings from the review process and codify these findings for inclusion in the needs assessment. Identify any conclusions regarding needs, root causes, and recommendations for addressing identified needs.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Be systematic in your review processes. From identifying potential documents and developing a review protocol to collectively reviewing the information attained through the review of multiple documents, systematic processes ensure that valuable information is not missed during the review.
- Triangulate data to the extent possible. In other words, when the document review yields data/information that may directly feed into the needs assessment, attempt to locate confirmatory data/information by examining other independent sources. If the data/information can be triangulated, it increases the likelihood that you can have confidence in its accuracy.
- When multiple reviewers are tasked with the role of reviewing document sources, provide clear and consistent guidelines to all reviewers on the procedures for completing the protocol/checklist or examination form. By ensuring that all reviewers receive the same guidelines for the protocol/checklist or examination form, you will ensure that the information is identified, analyzed, coded and documented in a consistent and reliable manner.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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

WEB SITES

An example of a document review conducted by Otero County Community Health Council:

<http://oterohealthcouncil.org/resources/evaluationdocs/documentreview.pdf>

Described as "(...) a summary of the Health Council minutes statewide. The minutes were reviewed by a team from UNM and analyzed regarding priorities and general Health Council functions."]

An example of a document review conducted for USAID:

<http://www.rhap.org.za/resources/234.pdf>

Document is entitled "Corridors Of Hope Regional HIV/Aids Cross-Border Prevention Program Secondary Analysis And Document Review".