Harnessing the Power of Community Feedback with a Qualitative Methodology

January 22nd, 2021
Webinar Agenda

Introductions

Why Qualitative Methodology?

Methodology and Guide Overview

Examples from Practice

Discussion
Who are we?

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What is MAPC?

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is the regional planning agency serving the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of the Metropolitan Boston region.

Our Mission: Our mission is to promote smart growth and regional collaboration.

Areas of Work: arts and culture, clean energy, climate, community engagement, land use planning, economic development, environment, housing, public health, public safety, transportation, public procurement
Where are you joining us from?
Project Background and Goals

Working with community feedback is an integral part of MAPC’s work but many staff do this differently and/or struggle to understand how best to use community feedback effectively.

• **Provide** a usable, flexible, detailed guide that answers existing questions and fills in existing resource gaps at MAPC

• **Improve** projects through systematic and strategic inclusion of feedback and qualitative data

• **Save** staff time and money on projects

• **Promote** more racially equitable projects
Methodology Overview

- What is Qualitative Data?
- Why Qualitative Data?
- Getting Started
- Collecting Data
- Understanding Data
- Sharing Data
Methodology is the strategy that you follow and the justification that you use for engaging in your project in the first place.

Methods are the tactics that you will use to complete your project (interviews, focus groups, text analysis, etc.)
What is Qualitative Data?

Any non-numerical, narrative, and/or experience-based data point that approximates, describes, or characterizes the subject at hand.

- Qualitative data is often text-based (direct quotes, observations, anecdotes, existing texts) but can also be image- or sound-based (pictures, videos, audio recordings).

- An easy way to think about this is that qualitative data is people’s stories. Where quantitative data answers the questions who, what, when, and where, qualitative data answers the questions why and how.
Why should you care about qualitative methodology?

- Most planners work with qualitative data in their projects. A methodology will make that work easier for you!
- Our work necessitates an understanding of the perspectives of a diversity of stakeholders

Racial Equity

- Quantitative data is not neutral and suffers from important racial biases
- A qualitative methodology can help address these issues by surfaced the lived experiences of communities who are undercounted and excluded from decision-making
How will Qualitative Data help you?

- **Better understand** the lived experiences, thoughts, and opinions of your projects’ stakeholders
- **Provide** significant depth and context to projects and address the inherent limitations of quantitative data
- **Ensure** that inequitable conditions and burdens are meaningfully addressed in your planning work
Methodology Overview

Guiding Questions

- **Why** are MAPC and the client pursuing this project?
- **What** are your and the client’s objectives for this process?
- **What** do you need to know to meet these objectives?
- **Why** do you need to know this?
- **How** will you use the knowledge that you collect?
Engaging in this work ethically

- Identify your biases
- Protect your participants’ confidentiality and make sure they know what they’re getting into
- Do you need to comply with FOIA?
- Work with community members/leaders to design your project, collect data
- Use interpretation and translation when necessary

Methodology Overview

What is Qualitative Data?

Why Qualitative Data?

Getting Started

Collecting Data

Understanding Data

Sharing Data
Dealing with Skepticism

Sometimes our colleagues and partners must be convinced that qualitative methods are important!

• Ask the person who is questioning your process/findings what they are concerned about?
• Ask them what they would need to feel more comfortable?
• Ask them if they have concerns about participant reliability?
Methodology Overview

Method Guidance and Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th># of participants at a time</th>
<th>Type of interaction</th>
<th>Skills and knowledge required</th>
<th>What does your data look like?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In-depth on-on-one conversation</td>
<td>Note-taking, facilitation</td>
<td>Rich narrative, quotes, long-form, single-perspective notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>5 to 12</td>
<td>Dialogue-based, small group, educational</td>
<td>Note-taking, facilitation, mediation</td>
<td>Conversation-based notes, narrative data, quotes, multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Passive, potentially interactive</td>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>Detailed description of activity, timeline, and activity environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Many (unlimited!)</td>
<td>One-way, not interactive, possibly educational.</td>
<td>Question writing, visual design</td>
<td>Large amounts of short answers, annotated images or maps. Provided via excel or a Qualtrics-based report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Meetings</td>
<td>Many (typically 20-100, more is also great!)</td>
<td>Large group, interactive, can be both one- or two-way</td>
<td>Facilitation, question writing, visual design</td>
<td>Posters with post-it note responses, short notes from participants, annotated maps (more, depending on your activities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Method Guidance and Descriptions

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**What?** Focus groups involve one or two facilitators gathering a group of stakeholders with at least one common characteristic for a facilitated discussion on a particular topic.

During the focus groups, participants can:
- Engage in dialogue with each other
- Child’s ideas and then share them back out,
- Be influenced in a way that may not have happened on their own.

Focus groups typically involve around 12 people and have a trained facilitator and moderator present. They may be used in a range of contexts:
- When you need a qualitative data-based, narrative-based, sometimes with quotes, and containing multiple perspectives.

**How?** Focus groups are useful when you want to facilitate something more active than brainstorming or when you feel like you want to gather insights from a group of people all at once. Focus groups are also helpful when you feel like a dialogue might facilitate increased awareness or surface existing ideas that might be difficult to verbalize individually.

Focus groups are used to get feedback on product design, marketing strategies, or other areas where understanding the thoughts and feelings of customers is crucial.

**When?** Like interviews, focus groups can occur throughout your process and can provide different benefits depending on:

- At the beginning, they can help identify potential areas for improvement on your project.
- Towards the end, they can be used to validate and refine recommendations.

**Structure**

Focus groups can vary in structure from loosely to highly structured.

- **Loosely structured focus groups:** provide an open-ended discussion where participants can share their thoughts and ideas naturally. They encourage creativity and facilitate a more natural flow of conversation, allowing participants to engage in meaningful dialogue.

- **Highly structured focus groups:** follow a pre-determined agenda, allowing facilitators to guide the conversation more directly. This structure can be useful when you need to focus on specific topics or when you want to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to contribute.

**What is Qualitative Data?**

Qualitative data is information that is not easily quantified or measured. It is often used to gain a deeper understanding of people’s attitudes, behaviors, and experiences.

**Why Qualitative Data?**

Using qualitative data can provide insights that are not possible with quantitative data. It allows researchers to explore complex issues and gain a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study.

**Getting Started**

To get started with qualitative research, it’s important to define your research questions, choose your methods, and consider ethical issues.

**Collecting Data**

This includes selecting participants, deciding on the type of data collection (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations), and choosing the appropriate data collection methods.

**Understanding Data**

Once data has been collected, it’s important to understand the data by analyzing it, identifying patterns, and drawing conclusions.

**Sharing Data**

Finally, sharing your findings with others is crucial to disseminating the results of your research and allowing others to contribute to the ongoing conversation.
Methodology Overview

Analysis Tools
The steps that you will take to understand your data are:

- **Familiarize** yourself with your data by skimming through everything once
- **Organize** and clean your data
- **Identify** themes and sub-themes in your data
- **Assign** relevant themes/sub-themes to each data point
- **Sort** your data by themes, review and refine your themes (you may want to do this several times)
- **Write** an explanation of what each theme and sub-theme has revealed to you
Synthesis FAQs

- What do I do if I think my results are skewed?
- What do I do if qualitative data contradicts or is critical of MAPC’s or the client’s work/values.
- What do I do if my qualitative data contradicts my quantitative data?
- How do I respond to pushback from partners

**Remember!** You should report on all the data you have collected, regardless of whether it is skewed, contradicts MAPC, or contradicts existing quantitative data. The only time you should not report on data is in order to preserve the confidentiality of any participants.

Take the appropriate steps to discuss in your deliverable your concerns. Call it out, discuss how that skew/contradiction might have impacted your findings, explain whether you considered it in any conclusions.
Sharing Tips and Examples

- Lead with the community’s voice!
- Showing, not Telling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Telling</th>
<th>Showing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most participants preferred McDonald Park to City Park because it is</td>
<td>Most participants said that they rarely visited City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easier to access on public transit.</td>
<td>Park because they could not easily get to it on public transit. Several</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>indicated that a trip to City Park would take them more than an hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>each way and require multiple transit transfers. As Caroline, a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participant in a focus group, explained: “My kids love City Park, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>we’ve had some frustrating experiences getting to and from. By the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time we get there, I’m exhausted and the kids are cranky and anxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from the long trip. Going back home is another story. I’ve just</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>started going to McDonald Park instead because it’s so much easier to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>get to!” Most participants agreed, indicating that they went to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McDonald Park over City Park because of ease of access and transit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accessibility.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sharing Tips and Examples

• Lead with the community’s voice!
  • Showing, not Telling
• Weave qualitative feedback throughout the document
• Discuss quantitative data and qualitative data in the same section
• Consult with the community
• Include anonymized notes in the appendix
Revere Workforce Development Plan

• Core Committee with both municipal and community leaders

• Stakeholder interviews coded by theme using an excel template from the methodology guide

• Quotes and images integrated throughout the report

• Corresponding Photovoice project

Examples from Practice

- Core Committee with both municipal and community leaders
- Stakeholder interviews coded by theme using an excel template from the methodology guide
- Quotes and images integrated throughout the report
- Corresponding Photovoice project
# Revere Workforce Development Plan

## Qualitative Data Tracker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Name</th>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Notes / Statements</th>
<th>Code #1</th>
<th>Code #2</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Note Taker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>Tell us about your organization. Our mission is to educate kids to protect the rights of our constituents.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Target Population</td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>Tell us about your organization. The software that we use is complete. We train all the volunteers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>Our ultimate goal is to set up our constituents for a better future.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Value Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce development do you have in your organization?</td>
<td>People are coming here with no English, with no knowledge of the American system.</td>
<td>Language barrier</td>
<td>Social barriers</td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce do you have?</td>
<td>They have experienced violence when they come here but nobody helps. They have contact with the police, civil rights, and policy issues.</td>
<td>Language barrier</td>
<td>Economic barriers</td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce?</td>
<td>So do some have professionals that come to the USA and end up with totally different professions. Some of them are lawyers or teachers as they countries but can't practice in the USA. Lack of the language in the urban means they end up working as a restaurant or the hotel industry.</td>
<td>Language barrier</td>
<td>Cultural barriers</td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
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<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce do you have?</td>
<td>Everything required computer and understanding of technology. We support constituents in learning how to navigate and computer technology.</td>
<td>Technological barriers</td>
<td></td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
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<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce do you have?</td>
<td>We also exchange materials to be part of the community and also engaged.</td>
<td>Value Statement</td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
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<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce do you have?</td>
<td>We also help our constituents navigate the school system and other local services.</td>
<td>Value Statement</td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>7/22/2020</td>
<td>Eduardo Sanchez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Tacon</td>
<td>Informational Interview</td>
<td>What type of workforce do you have?</td>
<td>We are open to everyone, including men and women.</td>
<td>Target Population</td>
<td>Value Statement</td>
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[Qualitative Data Tracker](#)
# Examples from Practice

Revere Workforce Development Plan

## Target Population Assessment | Interviews

### Mass Inc Worker Categorization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Incumbent Workers</th>
<th>Transitional Workers</th>
<th>Emerging Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>30 – 40 (traditional labor force age)</td>
<td>15 – 34 (Younger)</td>
<td>15 - 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both Male and Female but need more male for Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>US/Non-US Born</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non US Born or First Generation</td>
<td>Non US Born or First Generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primarily Spanish (Latina) and Arabic Speaking (Moroccan)</td>
<td>Students of Color (Latina, Black, Asian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Edu Attain</strong></td>
<td>Limited Formal Education / Training</td>
<td>Limited Formal Education or not Recognized Accreditations / Existing Training</td>
<td>Ongoing or Interrupted Educational Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Demographic Characteristics of Revere’s Primary Populations

1. Language Barriers
2. Cultural Knowledge/Understanding of US systems
3. Low Income
4. Lack of funding for services/training
5. Lack of physical space to turn to help
6. Age Discrimination
7. Family Care Costs
8. Disrupted education

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# Qualitative Data Tracker

Revere’s Workforce Photovoice Diaries
Examples from Practice

Gloucester Youth Mental Health Project

- 6 focus groups, 4 stakeholder interviews
- Coded data using Dedoose
- Summaries of qualitative findings and quotes integrated with quantitative survey results

“You know, they might send a kid to a program for three days, but that doesn’t address their problems. And then they end up just sending them back into the same program, you know, the same setting that kind of triggered what happened before, and they’re not getting any better. So I guess transition services, so if you do need the help you kind of need someone with you there through the process and not just kind of being, you know, okay, you’re done. You’re cleared now, go home, and then things act up again. That that’s a problem. So continuity of care is, I guess, what I’m getting at there…”
Examples from Practice

Lynn City Summit

- Partnership with municipal, community, and non-profit partners
- Reporting of verbatim notes in final document using the same language that participants used
- Concerns raised by municipal partner about content and findings in the data
Qualitative Data Pledge

I pledge to:

• Answer the guiding questions
• Lead with the community’s voice
• Work with community members and leaders
• Be flexible without losing sight of my project goals
• Take good notes
• Report on all the data I have (and make sure I respect confidentiality!)
• All data is useful, all data is valuable
Where can I find the guide?

Currently you can access the guide and the resources included in it by contacting:
**Christian Brandt** at cbrandt@mapc.org

In the future, the guide will be hosted on MAPC’s Community Engagement Team’s website:
https://www.mapc.org/our-work/services-for-cities-towns/community-engagement/
Discussion Time!