
Module 3

Guidebook

Module 3 is at the very heart of the *Social Research Toolkit*. Introduced in Module 3 are the techniques for actually collecting data. In building on the planning and design aspects of social research explored in Module 2, this Module turns attention toward the ways that data might be both identified and collected ‘in the field’.

Consideration is given to the two approaches to research- Qualitative and Quantitative research- and the techniques for collecting data that apply to these approaches. While Module 3 sees these techniques as somewhat distinct, it will be important to note that in a ‘real world’ application of research, a range of techniques would be used in conjunction with each other. So, an *interview* might supplement and inform data gathered from the researcher’s *observations*, which may in turn inform data collected from a *survey*, *gate counts* and so on. The idea will be to draw on the use of several data collection techniques to provide a rigorous response to the *Research Purpose* and *Research Questions* defined in the *Research Design Checklist* (Module 2).

Module 3-1 Quantitative Techniques

Two techniques for gathering Quantitative data are detailed in this first section of Module 3. *Survey* is introduced as a versatile and useful data collection technique, alongside *statistical counts*.

Most people are familiar with surveys in one form or other; whether through having completed a survey or indeed having conducted a survey. As a popular data collection technique, survey data collection provides a means of gauging people’s views on a range of topics; for the Social Research Toolkit survey can provide insight into the views that community members hold on a virtually inexhaustible range of topics.

Attention is then turned toward statistical counts. Statistical counts include such measures as ‘gate counts’ and attendance logs, and can provide a sense of how many people attended an event or indeed, how many people within a particular population adhere to certain characteristics (for example, how many women or men attended an

Module Content

Module 3 gets down to the task of actually collecting data, and in doing so introduces a set of data collection techniques useful in social research:

- Qualitative techniques, including *Interview*, *Observation* and *Document Analysis*
- Quantitative Techniques, including *Survey* and *Statistical Counts*.

Module 3 details the use of these data collection techniques and explores the applications they have in social research.

Module Activities

3-1 Quantitative Data Collection Techniques

3-2 Qualitative Data Collection Techniques

3-3 The Research Persona

3-4 Organising Data

Social Research Toolkit:

using social research in local government
community engagement

event, how many young people compared to adults undertook a certain activity and so on). Used as a measure for determining the broad quantities of a population or a characteristic appearing in a specific event, statistical counts offer a powerful means through which the 'how many' questions a researcher has might be answered.

Quantitative techniques for data collection provide an insight into the *how many*, *how often* and *how long* questions you might have in a research inquiry. Whether gathered via survey or statistical count, a sense of the frequency and duration of a phenomenon can be captured using Quantitative data collection techniques.

Module 3-2 Qualitative Techniques

Whereas Quantitative techniques for data collection will result in the collection of data that is expressed in numerical or statistical form, Qualitative techniques usually result in data that will be expressed in a *narrative* format. Techniques such as *interview*, *observation* and *document analysis* are key expressions of this and rely on the underlying 'story' or recollection of a phenomenon captured through the community members' perspective.

In this section of Module 3, attention is turned toward the ways that interview, observation and document analysis can provide a narrative account of a phenomenon and a direct insight into the thoughts and feelings of community members. This is key and when used in conjunction with survey and statistical count techniques, Qualitative techniques for collecting data provide the detail that underpins the *experience* of the phenomenon. For example, through interview, a direct insight into a community member's views can be captured-literally in their own words. With observation, the analysis of the layout and configuration of space, a sense of the spaces and locations used by different groups within a community, and a sense of the 'social order' can be determined through the researcher's own eyes. With document analysis, understandings of the underlying intentions of those who came to compile the documents that exist in any social setting (including formal documents like reports and policy, as well as informal documents like graffiti and posters) can be determined and worked into the research enquiry.

Qualitative techniques to research provide an insight into the thoughts and feelings of the community. This is important, as it is with qualitative research that an understanding of how individuals relate to each other and build a sense of connectedness to their community can be established.

Module 3-3 The Research Persona and the Organisation of Data

Module 3 culminates with the (re)consideration of the *Research Persona*. Drawing on concepts first encountered in Module 1 of the Social Research Toolkit, attention turns here to two aspects of the research persona:

- how the practitioner researcher comes to see her/himself as a researcher and which strengths the researcher has in certain types of research and with certain data collection techniques, and,
- how the practitioner researcher might come to be seen by community members when collecting data.

These are important considerations. Who you are as a researcher will suggest something about the types of data collection techniques you prefer using. Although practitioner researchers should always push themselves and try new approaches to research, it will be the case that certain 'favourite' approaches resonate with each researcher- ways of doing research that 'just work' according to who the researcher is.

Similarly, giving consideration to how the practitioner researcher is perceived by community members when conducting the research is vital. The perceptions community members' hold of the practitioner researcher will influence what data can be collected. It is a key consideration to reflect on how community relates to the practitioner researcher's identity and presence.

Module 3 is very much core to the *Social Research Toolkit* and provides the 'nuts and bolts' detail of doing research. *The Data Collection Techniques Guide*, as accessible via the Module 3 Resources section, should be referred to when working through this Module (especially at the stage when the research is planned and enacted).