Table 2: Ways of asking questions[6]

What it is	How you do it	Benefits	Limitations
Written surveys/ questionnaires	Send by post or email. You can create your own questions or adapt questions from Diagnostic tests or pre-made scales.[7] Always test first with a small 'pilot' group face-to-face for feedback. Create a database or other way to 'code' responses and analyse the results. May need to send different questionnaires to different groups depending upon what applies to their situations.[8] Responses can be named or anonymous.	· Cheap to administer · Prove uniform information · Data entry can be simple · Can be anonymous · Can be self-administered · Useful when the thing being measured is well-understood	· Low response rate · Responses can be biased by the questions · Questions may not have been understood · Not certain that the intended person filled in the survey · Difficulties interpreting responses · Some people have trouble with written expression or literacy · Can't check responses with the respondent · Not useful for complex or conceptual issues
Telephone surveys	These combine some of the advantages of written surveys with the personal interaction of in-person interviews.	· Relatively low cost · Personal interaction · High response rate · Empathy can motivate a longer/more complete discussion · Can check meaning · Can follow leads · Cheaper than face-to-face · Interviewee can be more relaxed in their own environment · Doesn't take long to get started · Contact with person is used productively, rather than chasing forms · Can combine open questions with pre-coded ones	· Can be difficult to contact people · Some people may not have telephones · Not useful for children · Not useful where interviewee doesn't speak the same language as you do · Respondents may not be able to have a conversation privately
Face-to-face surveys	Can combine questions with standard answers to more open-ended ones. Best applied when the number of people to interview is relatively small or concentrated in one area. Personal interaction can be helpful, but can also bias the results.	· Personalised · In-depth, free responses are possible · Personal connection can help motivate a longer or more complete discussion · Flexible and adaptable · The interviewee can respond to visual cues · Can combine open questions with pre-coded responses	· Expensive · Time-consuming · May intimidate some people/groups · Open to manipulation by interviewer · Can be affected by personality conflicts · Requires skilled interviewer · May be difficult to summarise findings · Difficulties of interviewer travel
Interviews/ Face-to-face surveys	Interviews are generally structured with a survey so that the interviewee will give their answer to specific questions. Can use Rickter Scale® or other visual methods to show progress. Interviews can also be less structured if the thing(s) you're asking about don't have recognised answers.	· Personalised · In depth, free-response · Empathy can motivate a longer/more complete discussion · Flexible/adaptable · Can give visual cues · Can combine open questions with pre-coded ones	· Expensive · Time consuming · May intimidate some individuals or groups · Open to manipulation by the interviewer · Vulnerable to personality conflicts · Required skilled interviewers · Might be difficult to summarise findings · Interviewer travel – issues of cost or safety
Observation	An observer can either participate in the activity, or can watch as the participants go about their activities. Involves watching and listening to an activity or session, taking notes, from one or many events over time. A framework for observation is needed so that different observers can describe what they see in a comparable way.	· Complex and rich source of information that can provide a vivid picture of effects on people, especially groups	· Small sample of behaviour · Lack of a sense of prior events – can be difficult to interpret or categorise what the observer sees · Relies on the observer's skills · The visit itself alters people's behaviour

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations
Focus Groups	Collect data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. They often help to generate questions but not necessarily definitive answers. Findings need to be compared to a larger survey. The value of a focus group can be strongly affected by the skills of the facilitator.	· Group interaction · Group consensus · In-depth discussion · Can be more efficient than one-to-one interviews · Uses less resources than one-to-one feedback · Democratic process where researcher/ observer is outnumbered by participants · Relatively immediate sense of results	· Small sample size · Group may not be representative · Responses all depend on one another and group format may create conformity where differences are suppressed · May cause people to feel like they need to 'take sides' (polarisation) · People may be manipulated by others in the group · Questions may not be asked the same way each time · Difficult to quantify the results or findings · Not appropriate for some sensitive issues
Participatory learning and action (PLA)	A facilitated process involving a group of beneficiaries in which members of the group interact, mainly around visual ways of expressing their opinions and thoughts. These can include timelines, flow charts, resource maps, problem ranking, and a variety of other methods depending upon the context, the skills of the participants, and the levels of literacy.	· Very useful in answering questions of how and why · Mutual learning environment can help build stakeholders' capacity · Able to capture a diversity of perceptions · Ability to understand complex processes · Good for a general impression of progress or outcomes · Ability to capture negative or unintended consequences · Can help to identify and articulate people's felt needs · Enhances organisation's accountability to its beneficiaries	· Opinions of those in the group may not represent those of others · Not very easy to analyse information rigorously · Can be costly · Requires specialised facilitation and knowledge of appropriate methods to engage people
Case studies	A detailed and real world method that complements broader, less-in depth methods such as telephone surveys or print/online questionnaires. They can show examples of how things happen.	· Can show how processes work over time and give insight into cause and effect. · Can provide 'colour' to supplement statistics or survey results which can be more interesting in a report format. · Multi-faceted; can show different perspectives · Vivid	· Time-consuming · Expensive · Anecdotal
Existing records	Records are existing sources that have been compiled for internal management uses. Looking at these for the purpose of understanding what is happened or to tell the story of the work.	· Can be useful for giving background information · Established at the time the activity happens to capture information during a process that is hard to capture afterwards · Cheap · Non-reactive · Doesn't interrupt the project or activity	· Often incomplete, inaccurate or out-of-date · Not usually compiled for evaluation purposes; may not answer the question an evaluation wants to answer · Possible confidentiality restrictions · Changes in activities, definition, or rules may make comparison difficult or impossible · Can be misleading unless fully explained · Only the facts – usually no interpretations
Art works, video and film	These can provide evidence of the achievements of a project in a compelling way.	· Filming may be relevant for performance based activities · Vivid impression · Creative and artistic · Can be motivating or fun for participants	· Expensive · Time consuming · Impression of the project or its outcomes can be affected by the quality of filming and presentation, rather than the quality of the project · Depends on the skills of the viewer in interpreting · Taken alone, inability to enquire of participants