

CORE GUIDE / 04

Data Collection & Quality

Design fieldwork that produces credible, ethical and usable evidence.

START WITH A DECISION, NOT A FORM.

Ask what decision the evidence should inform before deciding what to measure.

The essential idea

Data quality is not a final cleaning task. It is designed into the workflow: the tool, sampling, training, data collection, supervision, storage and review routine.

WHY IT MATTERS

Surveys, observations, assessments, administrative data, interviews and focus groups each answer different questions.

Choose methods that match the question

Surveys, observations, assessments, administrative data, interviews and focus groups each answer different questions.

- Use surveys for structured self-report.
- Use observation for visible practice or conditions.
- Use assessments for demonstrated knowledge or skill.
- Use qualitative methods to understand experience, reasons and context.

Build quality into the process

Data should be accurate enough, complete enough, timely enough and consistent enough for the decision it supports.

- Pretest tools with real users.
- Train collectors using practice scenarios.
- Use skip logic and validation carefully.
- Back-check samples and review unusual patterns.

Worked field example

A community programme wants to understand whether attendance barriers differ by neighbourhood and age group.

Programme question	Evidence to use	Decision it can support
What barriers prevent regular participation, and which ones can the programme act on?	Attendance records, short caregiver survey, focus groups and field notes.	Adjust session timing, transport support or referral pathways based on the dominant actionable barriers.

Try it in your work

- Write one data-quality risk before fieldwork starts.
- Add one validation rule and one human review check.
- Make a plan to store and protect data safely.

<p>Common mistakes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using leading or double-barrelled questions. • Training data collectors only on the form, not the purpose. • Ignoring missing data until analysis is due. 	<p>A stronger habit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot with the actual respondent group. • Review daily field dashboards for completeness. • Document all changes to tools and protocols.
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REFLECT	What could your team stop collecting because it does not currently support a decision, accountability requirement or learning conversation?
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