Analysing your data

This fact sheet provides a few pointers for getting started on drawing findings from the information you have gathered through your research.

To start with

Read through all or a sample of the responses to get a feeling for how people have responded. This can be good for identifying a theme or response that you weren’t expecting that you may want to look out for in other responses.

If you have run focus groups, make sure that you have your tapes or films transcribed, or your flipcharts and notes typed up.

Organising the responses

It is a good idea to number each of your questionnaires and put that number on each page so that if you split up the questionnaire you know that this relates to ‘respondent 49’.

If you are analysing by certain categories – for instance, ‘age groups’ – then you may want to photocopy the various age groups in different coloured paper. As an illustration, you could copy all under 18’s in blue and all over 50’s in yellow. This may ease further analysis.

Categorising

You may have a combination of closed and open questions. (See the ‘making your questionnaire’ fact sheet). Closed questions are good for easy analysis in terms of getting numbers and percentages quickly. It is simply a case of recording your findings. You can do this manually or in a spreadsheet, simply plotting, how many people responded a, b, or c to question 1 and so on.

For open questions, categorise and sub categorise the responses the same as in the focus group, so this does take more work but can give you a deeper and fuller picture of the issues you are researching.

Drawing conclusions

Now that you have both your questionnaire and focus group findings collated and categorised you need to make sense of the information. Key things to think about are:

* What are the relationships within and between the categories?
* Do particular groups have different or similar responses?
* If you have used more than one research method, do the findings paint a similar picture or contradict one another? If any results contradict each other you will need to consider doing some more research on those questions, possibly asking them in a different way or using a different method from before.

As you are going through this process of interpreting the data it is essential that you continually question your interpretations. It is good to keep checking out our findings with others so that we are coming up with clear robust evidence.