



ACET, Inc.

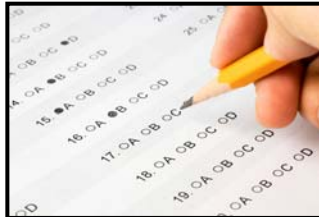
Action Consulting and Evaluation Team

Spring 2009 Newsletter

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ACET's Customized, Scannable Survey Solutions

ACET has expanded our services to include customized, scannable surveys. Not only can we offer our expertise in instrument design and execution, but we can now custom design a survey that can be filled out and then scanned for easy output and a quick turnaround. Our software allows us to easily handle a range of design challenges like split questions, grid blocks for items such as ID numbers, and question types such as a rank order or select all that apply. It also allows us to generate bar codes which can be used for a number of purposes including linking survey respondents (e.g., students within the same school). We can even capture handwritten responses in an image file for easy analysis. The software also contains special algorithms to detect errors of the survey taker, increasing the accuracy of error detection and of results. No need for eating up staff time with manual data entry anymore!



Please contact us if you are interested in converting an existing survey to a scannable version or if you would like more information about ACET's customized survey solutions.

ACET News

In February ACET sent two staff members, Heather Scholz and Joseph Curiel, to the 14th annual Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute. The theme of this year's institute was "Social Justice in an Era of Accountability: The Challenge for Evaluation." Both Heather and Joseph had the pleasure of hearing from Dr. Hazel Symonette who spoke on "ethics and excellence" for evaluators, providing her unique and important perspective on recognizing evaluators' need to be open to the many voices that must be heard in an evaluation. Joseph was also able to attend a session with Dr. Jean King on "Making the Most of Multi-Site Evaluations." The session highlighted a Utilization Focused and Participatory Evaluation approach to multi-site projects. Many challenges and strategies to overcome these challenges were discussed and several useful insights provided. Joseph attended a second session with Dr. Vanessa McKendall-Stephens where she discussed "Cultural Issues in Program Evaluation." Dr. McKendall-Stephens described some of her own experiences juggling ethical and cultural concerns in often challenging settings, and participants gained insight into approaches to diversity in an evaluation setting. Heather attended two sessions with Dr. Michael Quinn Patton. The first session focused on new directions in Utilization Focused Evaluation and how this approach has changed with the growing diversity of evaluation users and their needs. The second session facilitated by Dr. Patton centered on developmental evaluation and how program stakeholders and evaluators need to think beyond the relationship between individual and the program and acknowledge the environmental relationships and systems and their impact on the individuals situation. ACET is always happy to find great opportunities to support staff professional development.

LinkedIn

Visit ACET, Inc. and our staff members on LinkedIn, the social networking website with more than 35 million registered users. LinkedIn users establish connections with current and past professional colleagues and business partners. LinkedIn is a great way to create new business contacts: Users can ask to be introduced to a new contact through a mutually-known third person. This gated access approach also virtually eliminates unwanted contacts or messages. And while LinkedIn is a free service, you must register to use the site. If you are currently a member of the LinkedIn community, please consider connecting with ACET or our staff! To learn more about LinkedIn and what the site can do for you, visit: www.linkedin.com



Internship Opportunity

ACET is currently recruiting interns for late spring and summer. Our structured internship program includes a work plan, learning objectives, evaluation tasks/activities, and an estimated timeline for completion. Students will gain hands-on experience in the field of evaluation. For more information or an application, please visit <http://www.acetinc.com/Internship.html>

Alternatives in Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative data such as interview responses, focus group summaries, observations, and other written documents can be powerful data sources for program evaluation. While program progress is often measured using quantitative data (such as survey responses, test scores, or other numerical records), it is the qualitative data that can explain *how* a program works and *why* it is or is not successful.

But for all its richness, qualitative data is sometimes dismissed as simply “nice stories” or “added color.” In order to ensure the validity of narrative and descriptive qualitative data, a systemic approach to collection and analysis is essential. This includes having a documented plan for collecting the data and using rigorous analytical techniques such as categorization and coding to document patterns and themes in a program, and contextual analysis such as case studies and narrative summaries to capture larger program context.

Photographic storytelling is an innovative example of a qualitative data collection technique that, if administered correctly, can produce valid results and enhance understanding of a program. For example, let’s say there is a program which offers after-school support for youth at-risk. African American and Latino youth are paired with adult community members who work in specific trades (e.g., craftsmanship, law enforcement, and nursing). Youth and adult pairs work together on community service projects that promote community peace and beautification. For the evaluation, all program participants are given disposable cameras and instructed to take three to five pictures that capture what they believe to be the impact of the program. The pictures can be of their friends, advisors, activities, or specific projects.

Once the pictures are collected, the evaluators and participants review the pictures together and the participants respond to probes from the evaluator. The purpose is for the evaluators to elicit as much substantive information about the program as possible using the pictures to guide the discussion. This may be accomplished by asking questions such as:

- ◆ *Why is this picture special to you? Why did you choose to take this picture?*
- ◆ *Who is in the picture and what do you know about them?*
- ◆ *Tell me a story about what is happening in the picture?*
- ◆ *What do you have in common with the people in the picture?*
- ◆ *What is different about you and the people in the picture?*
- ◆ *What did you learn from the scene in this picture?*
- ◆ *What does this picture mean about the program?*



As with all qualitative data, the validity of photographic data is dependent on the rigorousness of the collection and analysis. The criteria for which pictures to take and analyze should dictate the number, timing, and subject matter of the photographs. The probing discussion should be established ahead of time and carefully followed with each participant. When a systemic procedure for collection and analysis is developed and followed, this method can yield valuable findings. Strengths of this technique include:

- ◆ Yields rigorous and data-rich results, similar to case studies;
- ◆ Allows participants to reflect on the program and the situation (through pictures); and
- ◆ Involves the participant in the evaluation actively (they are doing the activity, collecting the information, and reflecting).

Certain limitations do apply to using photographs as qualitative data. These might include:

- ◆ More time is needed to coordinate and summarize the results because data collection procedures need to be carefully coordinated or the results will not be useful for evaluation purposes (hence, the technique may require an experienced evaluator);
- ◆ Is subjective to a particular situation (i.e., that picture and what it represents at that moment); and
- ◆ Does not measure change over time (change from pre to post).

If you would like assistance exploring this technique for your program, please contact ACET, Inc.