

## EVOLVING OUR EVALUATION APPROACH

# COVID-19 Recommended Modifications Guide

Public health institutes, health departments, and other agencies have had to modify their approach to work in real-time to keep staff and communities safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluating programs and initiatives is essential to identifying public health best practices and promising interventions. However, prioritizing emergency response activities and physical distancing relating to the COVID-19 pandemic requires an evolution of our evaluation approach.

There are several factors that may create barriers to traditional evaluation approaches. Access to evaluation participants may become a challenge, and some organizations may have a large staff capacity dedicated to front line efforts and are unable to participate. Key community gatekeepers may not be able to facilitate entry with certain populations, and limited access to broadband, particularly in rural communities, can make transitioning to completely digital evaluation difficult.

With any evaluation effort, care should be taken to not place any participants, partners, consultants, or stakeholders in harm's way. Evaluation methodologies proposed should limit the exposure of stakeholders to the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. The National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) has developed following recommended strategies can support your evaluation approach during this time of physical distancing and pandemic response.

## VIRTUAL Data Collection Logistics



- Determine how your evaluation indicators and measures need to be revised in light of the COVID-19 epidemic. Assure that your analysis and commentary reflect modifications, and reasonable expectations of performance and outcomes.
- Engage in remote data collection leveraging online video conference and teleconference tools. Factor in emergency settings and time zone differences. Consider any technology access barriers that may impact the participant population or could affect recruitment of vulnerable populations.
- Consider digitally distributing incentives in lieu of previously planned in-person exchange.
- Video conference tools are preferred in cases where in-person data collection was the previously planned method.

<sup>1</sup>United Nations Development Programme retrieved from [web.undp.org](http://web.undp.org).

- Digital ethnographic data collection and virtual observation approaches can be discussed in cases where in-person observations were the previously planned method.
- Online survey platforms such as Qualtrics allow the preview of mobile device viewing to determine compatibility of survey questions and formatting with mobile devices.
- Zoom, RingCentral, or Skype interviews, mobile questionnaires, online surveys, collaboration platforms (Slack or Yammer) and satellite imagery could be used to gather data<sup>2</sup>.
- Cell phone video connections may be an option that can be encouraged and may also increase access. Share any written tools in advance with the participants since cell phone reading may be a challenge. If needed, conduct tests of participant's ability to connect prior to the interview.



## VIRTUAL Interview Strategies

- Make time for participants to share personal, community, family, and work reflections in relation to COVID-19.
- In addition to standard focus group expectations, set technology expectations up front including but not limited to ensuring that the participant's video and microphone are turned on.
- If available and included in your IRB application, record the interview using the video platform record button to support transcript development as needed.
- Include reflections on limitations using video interviews in reported findings.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



# VIRTUAL Focus Group Strategies

- Implement virtual warm up exercises<sup>3</sup>. Padlet is an effective tool for participant interaction.
- Make time for participants to share personal, community, family, and work reflections in relation to COVID-19.
- In addition to standard focus group expectations, set technology expectations up front including but not limited to muting lines, one person speaking at a time, and ensuring videos and microphones are turned on.
- If available and included in your IRB application, record the focus group using the video platform record button to support transcript development as needed.
- Consider allocating personal time for writing and thinking alone after a prompt is given before coming together as a group for discussion<sup>4</sup>. Zoom and other platforms offer the functionality for breakout rooms for partners or simultaneous focus groups as appropriate.
- Include reflections on limitations using video focus groups in reported findings<sup>5</sup>.
- Contact NNPHI for guidance on telephone focus groups. This method is not preferred as there is reduced ability to interpret non-verbal cues and more uncertainty in group communication timing and interaction.

## STAYING CONNECTED

- The NNPHI Evidence to Action (E2A) Team can offer technical assistance to modify methodologies that reflect remote arrangements and any changes in deliverables as per new evaluation plans.
- Share evaluation findings virtually on websites, e-mailed newsletters, and social media platforms as IRB guidelines permit as an alternative to public meetings. Develop simple videos and infographics as a communications tool.
- Stay connected with NNPHI E2A for ongoing collaborative discussion about research and evaluation needs.
- The health and safety of evaluators and participants is the priority and always comes first.

Through applied research, strategic planning, and data analysis, NNPHI's E2A team can provide your organization with thorough actionable recommendations. Tell us how we can support you at [evaluation@nnphi.org](mailto:evaluation@nnphi.org).

*For more on effective technology-based research strategies, review "Enhancing Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research with Technology" by Shalin Hai-Jew. ISBN 9781466664937*

For more information regarding additional NNPHI services in program design and implementation, training and workforce development, policy analysis and development, fiscal and administrative support, communications, and convening communities of practice, please visit <https://covid.nnphi.org/>.

<sup>3</sup>Mind Tools (2020). Virtual Ice Breakers. Retrieved from <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/virtual-ice-breakers.htm>

<sup>4</sup>American Evaluation Association. Retrieved from <https://aea365.org/blog/making-it-work-online-a-rapid-response-to-covid-by-barbara-klugman/>

<sup>5</sup>Nehls et al. (2015). Video-conferencing interviews in qualitative research. Retrieved from <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/video-conferencing-interviews-in-qualitative-research/117518>