**Whose Reality Counts? Collecting and Assessing Information on Your Target Group**

What are the financial realities and needs of your target group? A church can take a best guess, however, doing a proper assessment helps to lay the groundwork for a strong program that is tailored to participant’s demands and felt needs. By asking for their input, you also give them a sense of ownership by allowing input on the program design early on.

How does one collect data? A variety of tools and methods are options for gathering information, including observation checklists, focus groups, household surveys, and focus group interviews. Here, we’ll examine the latter two approaches for conducting research: household surveys and focus group interviews.

**Household Surveys**

Surveys can be powerful assessment tools, especially when combined with other forms of data collection. Before giving out a survey, always do two things: Thoroughly explain the purpose of the survey (to orient the respondent, dispel skepticism, and give a picture of why their input is important) and ensure confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Not asking for names increases the likelihood of receiving accurate responses.

While they have strengths, surveys also have a number of limitations. Surveys may have a high degree of inaccuracy. They also tend to favor those who are more highly literate. For these reasons alone, it is important to use them in combination with other tools. Below is a simple, one-page household financial assessment survey that can be adapted and used to collect financial data on potential participants for matched-savings and financial literacy.

**Focus Group Interviews**

While surveys are better suited for more pointed data collection, focus groups are beneficial for the social dynamic that they bring to data collection. Invite 3-10 potential matched- savings program participants for a 45-minutes learning discussion. Explain the matched savings program to them before the focus group. Alert them that their responses will be recorded, but ensure that they will be kept anonymous. Before beginning, set some guidelines that will ensure the interview is done respectfully. A tape recorder or person with a laptop is essential for recording the entire session. This way, the facilitator can be focused on directing the discussion and no data is lost.

Focus group interaction between participants allows for immediate “fact checking” and also creates a sense of openness for participants that may not be present in individual interviews. For focus groups, use open-ended questions that can spark discussion. Below is a sample focus group questionnaire that you can adapt to assess the relevancy of matched-savings for your target group.

**HouseHOLD Financial Assessment SURVEY**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. What is your age and sex?   Example: 25/Male |  |
| 1. What is the last grade or year of college that you completed? |  |
| 1. Do you own your home/residence? |  |
| 1. If you do not own your home, would you like to in the future? |  |
| 1. Please state your family’s yearly income – everyone in your household combined. |  |
| 1. Do you have a bank account of any sort? If so, is it checking, savings, or both? |  |
| 1. Have you had a bank account of any sort in the past? |  |
| 1. Does your family currently use some type of written-out household budget? |  |
| 1. Have you gotten a copy of your credit report in the last two years? |  |
| 1. Is your household currently saving money? |  |
| 1. If so, how much does your family usually save each month? |  |
| 1. If you were going to save toward a big purchase (a house, education, or car) how much could you save each month? |  |
| 1. How many months or years would you being willing to save in order to make this big purchase? |  |
| 1. Think about how people in your neighborhood budget, save, and use their money. What are the top three financial strengths in the community? | |
| 1. Describe the top 2 financial changes you would like to see in your community. | |

**Matched-Savings FOCUS Group INTERVIEW**

*The following questions assume that the concept of matched-savings has been explained to the focus group participants.*

Introduce yourself, the goals of the study, the anonymity of responses, and the guidelines for good discussion. Have all participants introduce themselves on a first-name basis.

Sample questions

1. What strengths does your community have (i.e. what does it have going for it)?
2. What types of change would you like to see in your community?
3. Envision this community 15 years in the future. What do you see?
4. Do people in this community save money? Why or why not?
5. Do people in this community use banks or credit unions? Why or why not?
6. Would you say that people in this community have good, average, or bad money management skills?
7. What topics about money management would you like to learn about? Why?
8. What assets would you be interested in purchasing through a matched-savings program—like a house, education, or business equipment? Why?
9. Would you participate in matched-savings program? Why or why not?
10. What would stand in your way of successfully completing the program?
11. What advice would you give to an organization that was thinking of starting a matched savings program in your community?