

5. Research

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Introduction

Thorough research is essential in strategic and operational planning. It is the foundation for all professional activity. In advocacy work, it ensures a thorough understanding of the political and consumer environment, which is vital to strategic advocacy. In practical work (e.g. service delivery activity), it is essential to ensuring the provision of the most appropriate and effective programmes, at the most competitive cost. In educational work, it can help to ensure that educational messages are appropriate, usable and reach target audiences effectively. In essence, well-targeted research can help animal protection activity to succeed without wasting precious time or money.

Categories of Research

There are two categories of research: -

- **Quantitative** – statistical techniques, surveys/market research, experimental techniques
Can be useful to illustrate scale of problem and/or when you want to generalise about an issue or sector (e.g. ‘consumers’ or ‘voters/public’)
- **Qualitative** – views, opinions and beliefs
Useful for ‘softer’ aspects, difficult to quantify (e.g. focus groups)

Data and its Sources

The difference between **data** and **information** is that data is raw, unprocessed whilst information is in an accessible, meaningful form.

Internal data (information held within your organisation)

External data (does not come from inside your organisation)

External data is also known as ‘**secondary data**’.

Some **useful sources** are: -

- Internet (range of information ever-increasing)
- Libraries
- Directories
- National and local agencies
- Databases

- Government information and statistics and other ‘public records’ (Freedom of information legislation is a great help here)
- Legislation and precedents (e.g. court cases)
- Trade associations/trade journals/trade e-mail lists/conferences
- Other NGOs, including animal protection societies
- Exhibitions and conferences
- News media
- Opinion Polls

A national library (or large public library) is probably the widest ranging source of published information.

Internet

An enormous amount of information can be found on the Internet these days. Using a search engine, such as Google (see Web Site reference below), you simply enter key words to define your search. If you are inundated with results, then make your keywords more restrictive/accurate. Conversely, if you obtain no results, simply widen your keyword category. When using information found on a Web site in a published document, this should be referenced using the Web Site url and the date accessed.

Organisational Library

Some larger animal protection organisations keep their own reference library. This can be extremely helpful, as it provides quick access to selected books, and relevant reports and other publications. Even smaller organisations can start useful book collections – it is surprising how these build up over time.

Scanning

The broadest form of information gathering is ‘scanning’. It can include all the factual material to be seen on television, read in newspapers and periodicals. To scan effectively the following is needed: -

- To identify and order relevant publications
- To ensure a range of publications in order to understand different viewpoints (e.g. different political viewpoints, trade as well as animal protection etc.)
- A press cutting service/person
- A circulation/notification system

There are four modes of scanning: -

- Undirected viewing – general exposure to information
- Conditioned viewing – directed exposure (e.g. through selected sources)
- Informal search – relatively limited and unstructured search
- Formal search – deliberate effort to acquire specific information

Scanning should be a continuous activity for campaigning organisations.

In practice any investigation can only use a small fraction of the available information.

**Warning: information is boundless; scanning can be costly.
And don't forget copyright law, and need to give sources!**

Need for Focus

As well as different modes of scanning, there are different levels of information gathering ranging from the broader political environment to that related directly to the campaign.

Tips for campaign research:

- Target within agreed campaign strategy
- Start wide; decide focus; narrow search

Meetings and Consultations

Once the available information has been collected, it is helpful to arrange background meetings and fact-finding consultations. These could include potential targets, partners, competitors or anybody involved in the issue or the fight against it e.g. government, industry, academics/scientists, cultural/religious bodies, professional bodies such as vets, lawyers, biologists etc., and other animal protection societies/NGOs.

This may lead to a greater understanding of: areas to target and/or avoid; potential strengths and weaknesses; driving factors of the problem; relevant political and legislative factors; potential collaborators and competitors etc.

Follow-up

After desk research there are various other research methods available: -

- Depth interviews
- Computer conferences
- Consultations/focus groups/working groups
- Opinion polls/surveys
- Case studies
- Pilot projects
- Field visits and investigations

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."
Ben Franklin

Further Resources

🔗 Web Sites

Search Engine

<http://www.google.com/>

The Web Centre for Social Research Methods

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/>

Data Centre – Campaign Research

http://www.datacenter.org/research/camp_res.htm

Corp Watch

<http://www.corpwatch.org/>

FREE resources for methods in evaluation and social research

<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/>

Books

Research Methods for Business Students: AND Research Navigator Access Card

Mark N.K. Saunders

Publisher: FT Prentice Hall

ISBN: 1405813970

Research Methods for Managers

John Gill, Phil Johnson

Publisher: Sage Publications Ltd

ISBN: 0761940022

Management Research: An Introduction (Sage Series in Management Research)

Mark Easterby-Smith, Richard Thorpe

Publisher: Sage Publications Ltd

ISBN: 0761972854

Doing Research in Business and Management: An Introduction to Process and Method

Dan Remenyi, Brian Williams, Arthur Money, Ethne Swartz

Publisher: Sage Publications Ltd

ISBN: 0761959505