Investing in Families Ethnography – Data Collection Methods

One of the methods that IIF will use to collect data is ethnography. Some of the data collection methods we will employ are presented below.

- Direct observation.
- Participant observation.
- First-hand involvement with participants via informal interviews, in person, by telephone or email.
- Systematic life history interviews at selected time points when participants are in the program.
- Keep a running list of the puzzle or rolling stories that emerge from observations and interviews and pursue these issues further in follow-up visits and conversations.
- Keep detailed field notes.
- Mine multiple data sets to develop narrative descriptions that document the range and complexity of the intersections between homeless families engaging in particular domains and their general welfare, housing, income, education and employment status.
- Look at the importance of different events on the trajectories and lives of participants.
- Use a qualitative research program to code and identify broad themes.
- Prepare narratives that show the inside perspectives of respondents and outside reflections of the researcher.
- Show participants their stories (which use pseudonyms) – which often results in their recognizing their strengths and accomplishments and realizing, sometimes for the first time how some of their main challenges reside in social institutions and policies.
- What are some of the challenges of ethnography? Oftentimes, because it conveys the complexity of the lives and situations people face, it does not result in concise sound bites, though is often the backdrop narrative that brings those sound bites to life, shedding light on the policies and practices that influence success.
- What are some of the uses of ethnography? Ethnography is used to give insight into the reality of the lives of participants and identify the story behind the numbers, and to make a case to policymakers and funders.
NEXT STEPS

The ethnographer will:

- Invite staff to suggest key research questions.
- Finalize data collection tools.
- Select a representative sample of interviewees, who want to participate in the ethnographic follow-up.
- Schedule and conduct interviews, observations, etc. with participants.
- Merge this data with other available data.
- Produce reports.