



INTERVIEWS

PURPOSE

The purpose of conducting interviews is to collect information from a single person through a systematic and structured format.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPLICATIONS

Individual interviews can often provide in-depth context, stories, and discussion related to one or more topics that are pertinent to the needs assessment. Such interviews can be done in an environment where the interviewer can ask for elaboration or explanation with follow-up questions. Interviews also offer an opportunity for the interviewee to become familiar with the needs assessment and its objectives. Individuals in positions of influence may also appreciate the additional personal attention that the interview can offer as opposed to a survey or focus group.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

ADVANTAGES

- Interviews typically allow for more focused discussions and follow-up questions.
- Individuals may offer information in interviews that they wouldn't offer in a group context.
- Interviews can be an excellent source for stories and context.
- The interviewer can observe the non-verbal behaviors of an interviewee.

DISADVANTAGES

- Time requirements for interviewers and interviewees can be significant.
- Interviews have the potential to reduce the scope and sample for data collection.
- The results of multiple interviews may contradict each other or be difficult to analyze.
- Interviewees may be biased or represent only a limited perspective on performance issues/themes.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

1. Create a list of all the information required for completing your needs assessment. Prioritize and align the list of information requirements based the objectives of your assessment and the available participants for the interviews.
2. Determine what information is required from each interview.

3. Select participants that can best provide the information you are looking for in the interviews. Experts are often included as interviewees, but novices should also be considered when questions regarding current (or entry) knowledge and skills are elements in the needs assessment's considerations.
4. For each interview, create a protocol that will guide the questions that are to be asked.
 - o You can leave room in the protocol for the interviewer to take notes during the interview and you can also include possible follow-up questions to help guide the discussion (see the link in the Web Sites section of this document for some suggestions on creating an interview protocol).
 - o Needs assessment interviews are most valuable when they are conducted with a formal and systematic process that can be replicated.
 - o In the protocol ensure that required information regarding both the current results and the desired results of the needs assessment are represented, along with the required information at each level of the program/project results chain.
5. Schedule a convenient time and location for the interview. The interview should take place in a friendly location where both the interviewee and interviewer will feel comfortable discussing potentially delicate topics.
6. During the interview take careful notes, offering to recap the response of the interviewee whenever there may be confusion. Follow the interview protocol carefully to ensure that you don't have to schedule a second interview to ask questions that may have been skipped. When possible, it is often a good idea to tape record an interview in order to verify your notes after the interview is complete.
7. Immediately following the interview review your notes carefully to ensure that you have accurately captured all of the relevant information. If you find any confusion this is the time to call or email the interviewee to verify information or ask for clarifications.
8. Relate the findings from each interview to other data sources for verification. For instance, if an interviewee quotes a news article or a research report it is typically useful to check that resource to ensure that the facts and figures provided by the interviewee were accurate and presented without bias.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Create a friendly and open environment by using active listening techniques (such as recapping, paraphrase, taking notes, and use friendly body-language).
- Refrain from asking leading questions or cutting off the interviewee during their response. In order to avoid cutting off interviewees, it is often helpful to include potential follow-up questions as part of the interview protocol.
- Asking the interviewee to respond with Critical Incidents can be a valuable technique to differentiate between perceptions and past experiences. When using Critical Incidents, interviewees are asked to provide past events as examples when they respond to specific questions. Each event should include a description of the conditions or context for the event, the people involved in the event, the place of the event, and the associated activities or behaviors of people in the event.

- Take good notes during the interview (or tape record it, if the participant is agreeable).

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Witkin, B.R., & Altschuld, J.W. (1995). Planning and Conducting Needs Assessments: A Practical Guide. Sage Publications, Inc.

WEB SITES

USAID article on conducting needs assessment interviews:

<http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=101&CID=281&CatID=281&ItemID=2813705&NID=20&LanguageID=0>

Conducting key informant interviews tip sheet:

http://ppa.aces.uiuc.edu/pdf_files/Conducting1.PDF

Asking open ended and probing questions tip sheet:

http://ppa.aces.uiuc.edu/pdf_files/Asking1.PDF

Tips for using individual interviews as a surveying technique:

http://ppa.aces.uiuc.edu/pdf_files/Tips.PDF

Getting the Lay of the Land on Health: A Guide for Using Interviews to Gather Information

http://www.accessproject.org/adobe/getting_the_lay_of_the_land_on_health.pdf

Information Brief: Developing Interview Protocols

<http://www.neirtec.org/evaluation/PDFs/PreparingtoCollect5.pdf>

Sample interview protocol:

http://www.ceismc.gatech.edu/MM_Tools/NIP.html.