

Effective Practice: Conducting Successful Personal Interviews

Source: Yasmin Cousar, MCC AmeriCorps*VISTA, Ferris State University 2005-2006

Issue Being Addressed:

Personal interviews can be used to get a deeper understanding of a participant's experience. During an interview an interviewer can learn important information regarding a service-learning topic. All interviews should have follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the responses. Usually open-ended questions are asked during interviews.

Before you start to design your interview questions and process, clearly articulate to yourself what problem or need is to be addressed using the information to be gathered by the interviews. This helps you keep clear focus on the intent of each question.

Action to consider:

Preparation for Interview

1. **Choose a setting with little distraction.** Avoid bright lights and loud noises. Ensure the interviewees are comfortable, etc. (You might ask them if they are). Often, they may feel more comfortable at their own places of work or homes.
2. **Explain the purpose of the interview.**
3. **Address terms of confidentiality.** Note any terms of confidentiality. (Be careful here. Rarely can you absolutely promise anything. Courts may get access to information, in certain circumstances.) Explain who will get access to their answers and how their answers will be analyzed. If their comments are to be used as quotes, get their written permission to do so.
4. **Explain the format of the interview.** Explain the type of interview you are conducting and its nature. If you want them to ask questions, specify that they are to do so either as they have them or at the end of the interview.
5. **Indicate how long the interview usually takes.**
6. **Tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to.**
7. **Ask them if they have any questions** before you both get started with the interview.
8. **Don't count on your memory to recall their answers.** Ask for permission to record the interview or bring along someone to take notes.

Reference:

McNamara, Carter. (1999) General Guidelines for Conducting Interviews:
<http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/interview.htm#anchor1404957>