1. EVALUATIVE THINKING AND INTERVIEWS

How Can Interviews be used Effectively?

An interview is a one-sided conversation between an interviewer and a respondent or group of respondents. The questions are pre-determined, but open-ended. The most important feature of interviews among data collection strategies is that they allow respondents to answer using their own terms. This provides an opportunity for the interviewer to clarify questions and for the respondent to share detailed explanations.

Interviews can be conducted in person, via phone, one-on-one, or in groups. They can be used almost interchangeably with surveys and are especially effective tools when:

- you have a smaller respondent group

- you have a group with which you have very regular contact (e.g. participants in a program who you see weekly or daily)

- you need to collect data that includes the respondent's "voice" and probe more deeply to get answers to more complex questions.

What Kinds of Data Can be Collected Using Interviews?

Like surveys, interviews are useful for collecting multiple kinds of data at the same time. They can be used to:

- **study attitudes or perceptions** (*How are projects like this valuable? How important is . . . to you?*)
- **collect self-reported assessment of change in response to program** (*Have you been able to apply what you learned? Give a specific example.*)
- **collect program assessments** (*Which parts of this training worked really well? What was challenging?*)
- **collect behavioral reports** (Present a scenario and then ask: *How would you behave in a situation like that? Would your day to day experiences be different if you hadn't attended . . .*)
- **determine change over time** (*How would you define . . . .? Is that different from how you've defined . . . in the past? Have you been able to change how you respond to . . . since you've been in the program?*).

Tips for Effective Interviewing (adapted from Patton 1987)
1. Communicate clearly about what information is desired, why it's important, what will happen to it.
2. Remember to ask single questions and use clear and appropriate language. Avoid leading questions.
3. Check or summarize occasionally. Let the respondent know if you are getting the information you need, and especially if you're not. Also let the respondent know how many more questions there are periodically.
4. Understand the difference between a depth interview and an interrogation.
5. Observe the respondent while interviewing for signs of boredom, fatigue, or deceptiveness
6. Recognize when the respondent is not clearly answering and press for a full response.
7. Maintain control of the interview and neutrality toward the content of response.
8. Treat the respondent with respect.
9. Don't share your opinions or knowledge. Don't interrupt unless the interview Is out of hand.
10. Practice interviewing – develop your skills.

Conducting interviews with multiple types of informants (e.g., participants, their caregivers and staff who work with them), and in conjunction with other types of data collection (i.e., surveys, observations or record reviews) adds rigor to program evaluation. Like surveys, good interviews require a good interview protocol, administration plan and analysis plan, all developed before the interview is conducted.

What Methodological Decisions Must be Made Before Conducting Interviews?

Interviews are widely used in program evaluation, but they are sometimes overlooked as a strategy because they are time consuming to administer and analyze. Effective data collectors always determine the purpose for the interview, collect some background information about respondents, and decide the following before conducting interviews.

- What type of interview should be conducted?

  ◆ **Structured** – a list of questions, always presented in the same order to each respondent, which can include survey-like items with pre-selected answer choices.

  ◆ **Semi-Structured***– a list of truly open-ended questions, usually presented in the same order to each respondent, but variation is allowed. *This is the most common type of interview.*

  ◆ **Unstructured** – a list, or partial list of questions to be presented in any order, items can be added as the interview proceeds.

  ◆ **Intercept** – a very short interview (2 or 3 questions), asked literally while a respondent is coming to or leaving an event or program [*see box below for more details*].

- What questions will be asked and how will they be analyzed? How will the questions be worded and sequenced?

- What time frame will be used – past, present, future, mixed?

- How much detail is desired and how long will it take for a respondent to complete the interview? (Generally interviews, other than intercept interviews, should last between 20 and 40 minutes. *If more than 40 minutes is needed, consider conducting multiple interviews. Expect substantial amounts of qualitative data to result.*)

- Who and where are the respondents (is background information about them available)? Is translation necessary? Are group interviews possible? Is consent, particularly that of the respondent necessary?

The data collection instrument for an interview is called an interview protocol, interview guide or interview schedule. This can include just the questions in a numbered list, or the questions with space for recording respondent' answers. Interview protocols should also include space for identifying the date, time, name and title of the respondent and interviewer, as well as any "script" information that the interviewer needs to relay to the respondent regarding the purpose of the interview. As with surveys, the interviewer needs to prioritize and be selective regarding how many questions to ask – somewhere between 10 and 20 is advisable. (A sample interview protocol is included at the end of this bulletin.)

Intercept Interviews and Surveys can yield fast, useful information from hard-to-reach respondents.
If your data needs can be focused on just a few brief questions, consider intercept strategies. If multiple questions are needed, multiple intercept protocols can be produced so that different respondents answer different questions. The data are combined later for analysis. Questions can be close-ended, like a facilitated survey, or open-ended.

Examples of "Interception"
  ◆ Participants in a multi-activity program are stopped as they transition from one activity to another, or the interviewer literally accompanies and questions the respondent as the transition occurs.
  ◆ Attendees at an event are stopped briefly as they enter or exit the venue.
  ◆ Parents at a bus stop awaiting the return of their children from an outing are intercepted by multiple interviewers with clip boards and brief protocols. Additional interviewers are on the bus with the children asking them questions.

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Conducting interviews requires skill and additional decision-making. First and foremost, the interviewer must be familiar with the protocol so delivery of the questions is natural and complete. Review and practice are strongly advised. Before the interview begins, the interviewer should obtain the respondent's consent[1] if needed and then clarify the purpose of the interview and what will happen to the responses (data). During the interviewer should ask singular, relatively short questions, and avoid terminology or language that is unfamiliar to the respondent. Additional **probes** can be used to follow-up questions as necessary so the interviewer obtains depth and details.

EXAMPLE: Interview Protocol Items with Probes

7. What participant outcomes do you think the afterschool program is designed to produce? (Probe: distinguish between long term and intermediate outcomes; Probe for outcomes related specifically to the literacy development component of the program).

8. How would you assess participant progress? (Probe: what specific outcomes have participating youth accomplished – get examples).

9. Do you think being in the program helps participants with school? (Probe: If so, how, if not, why not?) (Probe: are these afterschool activities seen as totally separate from the school/formal education – get specific examples).

(Excerpted from an interview of classroom teachers about an afterschool program.

After each interview, the interviewer still has a few steps to complete to insure that data can be used effectively. Specifically, the interviewer must:

- **Review all interview responses**, clarify notes and decide about transcription. *(Typically, in small-scale program evaluation, interview notes are not transcribed. Often responses have been recorded directly into an electronic file and either those electronic notes or hand-written notes are analyzed directly without ever developing a full transcript of all responses.)*

- **Record observations about the interview** (i.e., clarify what was happening during the interview and whether the respondent seemed comfortable and engaged, noting any unusual circumstances).

- **Evaluate how the interview went and determine follow-up needs**. *(It is especially useful to record whether the interviewer thinks respondent had given complete responses or was evasive or distracted,and to list any additional questions that might be necessary for the respondent).*

Lastly, the interviewer must summarize key findings from each interview using the analysis plan developed as the protocol or list of questions was determined. Note that raw (un-analyzed) survey and interview data are very different for the most part, (although open-ended survey responses are similar to open-ended interview responses) therefore analytical strategies are different for them.

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[1] Consent can be provided verbally or more commonly in writing (see the final page of this bulletin for an example of a consent form.) There are available technologies that allow the interview to capture a respondent's signature electronically on a laptop, tablet or smartphone.

Where analyses of survey data tend to focus on frequencies and cross-tabulation (i.e., using numbers), analyses of interview data tend to focus on themes, descriptions and quotes (i.e., words). But it is also common to count words, or ideas or themes when analyzing interview data, and present the results in numeric terms (a process known as enumeration). While actual counts of interview responses are not required, numeric summarization is common using terms like some, most, several, etc. For example when interview respondents are asked for final feedback about a program, an analysis might include assessment of positive, neutral and negative responses (e.g., *most*, 6 out of 10 *respondents, were very positive about the program*).

Collecting, analyzing and reporting about data from interviews is an excellent way to get comprehensive findings, but it is definitely labor intensive and usually only results in rich data about a fairly narrowly framed set of findings. Combining data collected through interviews with data collected via surveys or observations or record reviews can enhance coverage.

Generalization from interview data is usually not feasible as data sets are small and often non-random (made up instead of rich cases). Rather summarization of interview data is used to describe strategies or participants and/or to highlight or help clarify certain findings determined through surveys, observations or record review.

Analyzed Interview Data Example

INTERVIEW RESULTS:Tutors (n = 14)
Though most came from out of the neighborhood, after a full day of work, they expressed gratitude for the opportunity they had at EHTP (the tutorial program). As exemplified in the following quotes, they were committed to EHTP and their tutees, and found their participation rewarding.

❖ *"It's a privilege to be able to be doing something like this. EHTP and my tutee are always appreciative. This gives me a framework to be a part of somebody's life."*

❖ *"I wish I could get more of my single friends to be tutors. It's a very positive use of my time."*

❖ *"I really like being here. It's a big highlight of my week. I make this my top priority."*

INTERVIEW RESULTS: Tutees n =10)
Those receiving tutoring services were also complimentary of the relationships they had with tutors. They participated in tutoring because:
• they needed specific help and wanted it to be different than school,
• they liked the one-on-one attention and guidance,
• they needed a safe and interesting place to be during the summer,
• they had friends or relatives that were/are participants.

When asked to reflect on what made their participation special, they routinely described positive (and different) interactions with their tutors.

❖ *"He pushes me hard and makes me think. I have to use my brain here."*

❖ *"She goes out her way to help me, no matter how small the problem is."*

❖ *"[My tutor] is fun. She doesn't yell at me like my teachers. She lets me do what I want to do, but she still keeps me in check."*

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What can you do to Enhance Evaluative Use of Interviews?

There are definite steps that can be taken to enhance the effectiveness of interviews so that findings from them can inform data-driven decisions. *(Using findings and making data-driven decisions are key elements of evaluative thinking.)*

1. USE EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING SKILLS (use instructions shown in the text box page 1).

2. DEVISE AND CAREFULLY FOLLOW AN ADMINISTRATION PLAN.

Even well-written interview protocols and use of all the effective interviewing tips will not yield sufficiently useful information if the interviews are not administered effectively. Interviewers need to be sure they spend sufficient time preparing to conduct interviews and conducting initial processing steps after their interviews are completed so that findings can inform data-driven decisions. *Use the sampling advice shown in the box to the right to determine how many and who should be interviewed.*

3. DEVELOP AN ANALYSIS PLAN BEFORE CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS.

Planning for use of interview data before it is collected is an essential step. As for surveys, it will help strengthen the content of the interview protocol and it will help the interviewer make choices about how much and what to ask. It should be possible to identify what will be done with the results of each interview question and if not, perhaps the questions should be deemed un-necessary. Analysis plans also provide specific directions for what to do with data once it is collected so the analyst is not overwhelmed and the analysis process can be expedited.

A good analysis plan must specify what procedures will be conducted with each question or group of questions in the interview. It should also include directions for:

- how data will be segmented or partitioned (i.e., divided into meaningful "chunks." -- e.g., by question number, by role of respondent)

- how data will be coded (e.g., desired response vs. undesired response, representative of a theme, + or -) and how to ensure that all involved in analysis agree on assignment of codes

- how findings will be presented (narrative summaries, bulleted statements, sample quotes to illustrate findings).

4. CONDUCT YOUR ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO YOUR PLAN

Read/review completed sets of interviews and record general summaries. Where appropriate encode responses and then organize, summarize and display the coded data. Use quotes to illustrate findings. *Be sure to verify/validate your findings with key stakeholders (i.e., see if they interpret your findings similarly). Revise summaries and displays accordingly.

Selecting Interview Respondents

Because qualitative data are usually collected for much smaller numbers of informants or respondents, sampling strategies used to determine sample composition for surveys are not relevant for selecting who gets interviewed.

Interview respondents are selected to comprise **Purposeful Samples** which must include information-rich cases. Choose from one or a combination of the following:

- Typical cases
- Extreme or deviant cases
- Cases that provide maximum variation
- Critical cases (those that can make a point dramatically)

Rules of Thumb Regarding Interview Sample Size

- If the population is small (less than 12), strive to interview everyone.

- If the population is larger, select about 12 cases (using the case types described above).

Be sure to review your respondent selection strategy with your stakeholders so they will trust the results once they are determined.

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Conducting Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups have been borrowed by evaluators from marketing professionals. For evaluation purposes, focus groups are usually conducted with a semi-structured protocol or list of topics (focuses). The respondents are asked to discuss the topics and the interviewer facilitates, records and later analyzes the discussion. (Often two evaluators are needed to facilitate and record results from focus groups.) The following are suggested guidelines for effective focus group data collection.

1. **Carefully recruit participants**. This will require:

   - Systematic recruitment procedures
   - Selection of 5 to 10 people per group
   - Selection of similar types of people, but not close friends
   - Conducting 3 to 4 groups per topic

2. **Provide a proper meeting environment, including**:

   - Neutral setting, circle seating

   - Materials for recording responses (such as multiple easel pages so respondents can review facilitator's records, and/or tape recorders to store actual response data. Note if focus groups are taped PERMISSION MUST BE GRANTED BY RESPONDENTS.

3. **Use a skilled moderator who:**

   - Is trained, has adequate knowledge of the topic, connects enough with participants to ensure response

   - Has a smooth and snappy introduction that includes a welcome, overview and ground rules

   - Uses pre-determined questions, uses pauses an probes (such as "please explain further")

   - Uses an assistant moderator to handle logistics and take notes

   - Establishes a permissive environment, controls verbal and nonverbal reactions to participants

   - Uses subtle group control (manages experts, dominant talkers, shy participants, ramblers)

   - Uses 3-step conclusion – summarizes with confirmation, reviews purpose and asks for missing data, thanks participants.

4. **Conduct appropriate data analysis and report findings accurately**

   - Use systematic analyses similar to that conducted with interview data
   - Summarize trends identified by focus group respondents and clarify where there was agreement and disagreement among participants. Where necessary, encode the discussions from each focus and then summarize encoded findings.
   - Use excerpts (quotes) from focus group discussion s to clarify summary statements and provide examples.

Morgan, David L., ed. *Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art*. Sage Focus Edition.
Stewart, D.W., and Shamdasani, P. N. *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice.* Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 20.

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CAE YOUTH PARTICIPANTS 2nd INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
45-60 minutes

Respondent Name:	Title:
Interviewer:	Today's Date:

1. **How long has it been since your last involvement/attendance at the center?**

2. **Have you been to any of the other participating centers/shelters for anti-violence workshops? What was that like?**

3. **Have you continued to take anti-violence workshops at any center since year 1?**

4. **How has violence affected your life in the last 3 months? This includes verbal fights, physical violence, harassment, sexual harassment, or relationship violence that you have witnessed, been involved in, or escaped from/prevented.**

5. **What did you learn from the workshop(s) that has stuck with you the most?**

6. **Can you remember 2 other important things you learned from the workshop(s)?**

Thinking about the last 3 months, since _____(anchoring event/date)_____: (+" If yes, why" or how to all of the following)

7. **Have you shared or taught your friends anything you learned from the workshop(s)?**

8. **Would your day to day experiences be different if you hadn't attended the workshop(s)? How?**

EVALUATIVE THINKING

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Informed Consent to Participate in CAAV Case Study

If you have questions or concerns before signing this form, or if you would like to know more about the final results of this study, please contact:

Name of Senior Evaluator
Title
Company of Senior Evaluator
Street Address
City, State, Zip
www.organization.name.org

Giving of Consent, Acknowledgement of Compensation

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age or emancipated. My signature below also indicates that I have received payment for participating in an interview today.

_____
Your Name (Printed)

_____   _____
        (Signature)   Date

_____   _____
Name of Evaluator (Signed)   Date

NEED MORE DETAILS – SEE STUDY OVERVIEW (attached)

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