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Creating Solid Interview Guides

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Creating Solid Interview Guides

Greetings! We are Laura Sefton from the University of Massachusetts Medical School's [Center for Health Policy and Research](#) and Linda Cabral from [Care Transformation Collaborative-Rhode Island](#). When choosing qualitative interviews as the data collection method for your evaluation project, developing an appropriate interview guide is key to gathering the information you need. The interviews should aim to collect data that informs your evaluation aims and avoids collecting superfluous information. From our experience in developing interview guides over the last 10 years, we have the following insights to offer:

Hot Tips

Wording is key: Questions should be straightforward and gather insights from your respondents. Your goal should be to develop questions that are non-judgmental and facilitate conversation. Word your questions in ways that elicit more than yes/no responses. Avoid questions that ask “why,” as they may put your respondent on the defensive. Adjust your wording according to the intended respondent; what works for a program CEO may not work for a client of the same program.

Begin with a warm-up and end with closure: The first question should be one that your respondent can answer easily (e.g., “Tell me about your job responsibilities.”). This initial rapport-building can put you and the respondent at ease with one another and make the rest of the interview flow more smoothly. To provide closure to the interview, we often ask respondents for any final thoughts they want to share with us. This provides them with an opportunity to give us information we may not have asked about but that they felt was important to share.

Probe for more detail: Probes, or prompts, are handy when you are not getting the information you had hoped for or you want to be sure to get as complete information as possible on certain questions. A list of probes for key questions can help you elicit more detailed and elaborate responses (e.g., “Can you tell me more about that?” “What makes you feel that way?”).

Consider how much time you have: Once you have your set of key questions, revisit them to see if you can pack them down into fewer questions. We found that we can generally get through approximately ten in-depth questions and any necessary probes in a one-hour interview. Be prepared to ask only your key questions. Your actual interview time may be less than planned or some questions may take longer to get through.

Lessons Learned

It’s ok to revise the interview guide after starting data collection: After completing your first few interviews, you may find that certain questions didn’t give you the information you wanted, were difficult for your respondents to understand or answer, or didn’t flow well. Build in time to debrief with your data collection team (and your client, if appropriate) on your early interviews and make adjustments to the guide as necessary.

Rad Resource

As with many topics related to qualitative research, Michael Quinn Patton's [Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods](#) serves as a useful resource for developing interview guides.