

WORKBOOK E:

**CONDUCTING
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

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OVERVIEW OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

An in-depth interview is an open-ended, discovery-oriented method to obtain detailed information about a topic from a stakeholder. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method; their goal is to explore in depth a respondent's point of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives. These types of interviews are often conducted **at the beginning of a larger research project** when there are questions about how to narrow the focus of the research, or what questions need to be explored through the research. They are therefore an especially good choice for communities who have **unique research goals** that do not easily fit into some of the common objectives described in this manual.

Steps Involved in Conducting In-depth Interviews

1. Developing a sampling strategy

(Whose attitudes and beliefs matter to your research, and how will you find these people?)



2. Writing an in-depth interview guide

(An in-depth interview guide contains the questions that will be asked during the interview.)



3. Conducting the interviews

(Contact potential respondents to complete an interview.)



4. Analyzing the data

(Making sense of the findings.)

You may want to conduct in-depth interviews instead of focus groups if the topics you wish to explore are **highly sensitive in nature**, and people may be uncomfortable sharing their honest feelings in a group setting, or in situations when it would be **logistically difficult** to get the people you want to hear from into one room at one time (e.g., geographic distance, types of participants with unpredictable or very busy schedules, etc).

In-depth interviews have more in common with a journalist's interview than with a survey interview. For example, surveys have fixed questionnaires, whereas **an in-depth interview functions much more like a moderator guide**—there are no scales, respondents answer in their own words, and the interviewer can adjust the order and flow of the questions and ask additional questions as needed. Telephone surveys typically involve a larger number of respondents (i.e., 100 interviews or more), while for in-depth interviews, it is **much more common to conduct as few as 10 to 15 interviews**. You will typically use a random sampling strategy for a telephone survey in order to interview a cross-section of the population; for in-depth interviews, however, you do not need to be concerned about ending up with representative results.

Advantages and Disadvantages of In-depth Interviews

Advantages

- ▶ **Depth:** In-depth interviews can uncover valuable insights, and enable you to find out “the real story” from the people in the know.
- ▶ **Disclosure:** Respondents are most likely to open up on a one-on-one basis.
- ▶ **Quality of data:** Skilled interviewers are able respond to questions and probe for greater detail. Questions can be added or altered in real-time if needed.
- ▶ **Short timelines:** Data can be collected faster than other research methods—usually within a few weeks.

Disadvantages

- ▶ **Analysis can be challenging, time-consuming:** Qualitative data can be ambiguous, resulting in a more difficult analysis, particularly for less experienced analysts.
- ▶ **Interviewing requires a high level of training and skill:** It is important to have well-trained, highly-skilled interviewers conducting this type of interview. Using less skilled interviewers increases the possibility of bias.
- ▶ **Small numbers:** Given the length of each interview and the associated costs, the number of in-depth interviews you will complete for a research project will be small (there is no standard number of interviews, but a total of between 10 and 15 interviews would not be uncommon).

Deciding Whether or Not to Outsource In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews can be a good choice for organizations who prefer to conduct research using internal resources, as they generally involve a more manageable time commitment, compared with telephone surveys and focus groups. You may conduct anywhere from five to fifty in-depth interviews, depending on your research goals (the more interviews you conduct, the more complex and time-consuming the analysis). You may conduct in-depth interviews with one type of respondent (e.g., local educators), or with several types of respondents (e.g., local educators, local policymakers, and local after-school program operators) to obtain different perspectives about your topic.

- ▶ **When to outsource in-depth interviews:** You may want to outsource in-depth interviews if they are one component of a larger research project that you are outsourcing. In-depths are often combined with other research methods (e.g., to obtain preliminary information prior to conducting a telephone survey), and it is useful to have one vendor conduct all components of a multi-phase research project, as each phase will inform the other phases of the project.
- ▶ **When to conduct in-depth interviews using internal resources:** You may want to conduct in-depth interviews if you have staff with characteristics that would predispose them to being good interviewers, adequate skill and training, and the time to devote to interviewing (which can include contacting potential respondents multiple times and leaving messages before completing an interview).

Including Area Schools in Your Research Planning Process

No matter what research method you plan to use to inform your community's OST planning process, it is a good idea to **include area schools in your research planning process**. If you plan to conduct in-depth interviews with area teachers and principals, it may be helpful to enlist the support of school superintendents before contacting them.

It is helpful if someone on the project planning team has connections with the school department and can contact superintendents to get their buy-in. Ideally, the superintendent can assist you in contacting school principals to get their buy-in. Two good strategies for obtaining buy-in are to **emphasize the value of the research**, and **make it easy for schools to participate**. For example, make sure school superintendents and principals understand the importance of your research project and the direct benefit this research will have on your community's children. Try to arrange your research project so that it uses as few school resources as possible. In addition, there may be other organizations involved in the initiative, each with its own internal review processes.

What Communities Have Learned

Enhance the value of participation. “The challenge is convincing the principal to administer the survey in his or her school, and helping them find a way to get it done. Schools always have special projects, and fitting in a survey is often not the principal's first priority. What we tried to do after the first year was to feed back the principal's own school information, so that they got a direct benefit from participating. They were the only ones that received their own school's information—everything else we did was by the entire region. Principals had control over their own school's specific information.”

You must get buy-in from principals even if you have conducted research at the school previously. “This third year [that we've done the research], we didn't market to principals well enough. We thought maybe that they would have been more on board the third year. I think the big lesson is that every year you do research, you've got to treat it like it's the first year, and really sell it to the people who control whether or not your research is going to be successful. For example, just because you gave incentives the first year, you shouldn't think that incentives won't be necessary the second year. You can't let up on the marketing aspect of your research. You've got to constantly assume that people aren't necessarily on board.”

--Bob Goerge, Chapin Hall Center for Children. Conducted a multi-phase research project, including self-administered surveys of high school students in Chicago, in-depth interviews with students, and an inventory of OST programs in Chicago. The objective of this research was to better understand participation in OST programs and other activities among Chicago youth, as well as the effects of established programs.

In the next sections, we will present more detailed information regarding outsourcing in-depth interviews and conducting in-depth interviews using internal resources. For communities conducting in-depth interviews using internal resources, we will present information about each step in the process.

Passive Consent

What is Passive Consent? *Passive consent* is the process whereby consent is given by not returning an “opt-out” or “withdrawal” form. In other words, parents are given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the research. If they do not withdraw their child, then the researchers can include the child in the research. This differs from *active consent*, which requires that parents confirm in writing their permission for their child to participate in research. Many CBOs and school districts now use passive consent rather than active consent in order to secure the participation of students in important research. A sample withdrawal form is included on the CD of prototype materials included with this guide.

Why Use Passive Consent?

- ▶ Active consent has been criticized as an overly rigid process that severely limits access to students for survey research. Proponents of passive consent note that survey research such as that proposed herein already has minimal risks, is anonymous or confidential, and is voluntary.
- ▶ Research suggests that passive consent results in a more representative sample. Students who would have been excluded by active consent because they or their parents simply forgot to sign and return an active consent form can now be included in the research.
- ▶ Passive consent generally involves less cost and labor for researchers.

Passive Consent Recommendations

- ▶ Most importantly, specific schools, districts, or organizations may have their own consent policies. Always check with the schools or organizations you are working with to be sure that passive consent is permitted.
- ▶ Allow more than one way for parents to refuse their child’s participation. For example, they could return the form, call a telephone number on the form, or reply by email.
- ▶ Make sure all materials are language-appropriate. For example, if you anticipate a population with limited English-reading ability, be sure to provide forms in the appropriate primary language.
- ▶ Parents should be given sufficient time to refuse their child’s participation. We recommend that you hand out forms about one week prior to research. This provides adequate time for refusal, but is not so far in advance that the form is forgotten or deemed irrelevant.
- ▶ Be sure to include the following information on the withdrawal form:
 - Topic of research.
 - Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not negatively affect the student.
 - No identifying information is recorded (the survey is anonymous) or if recorded, every effort is made to keep the information confidential.
 - The dates of the research, and how long the research will take (e.g., “the survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete”).
 - Any potential risks (for this type of survey research, risks are minimal. Be sure the student knows that if at any time they feel uncomfortable participating in the survey, they can stop).
 - Any direct benefit to the student for participating (for example, better after-school programs).
 - All relevant contact information (e.g., the school or organization conducting the research).

OUTSOURCING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: A Guide to Hiring Vendors

Who to hire:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Full-service market research firm ▶ Professional focus group moderator ▶ Data collection firm (ask about interviewer training)
What to look for:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Request references: are former clients satisfied? ▶ Experience with in-depth interviews ▶ Knowledge of OST industry a plus ▶ Experience working with target population a plus
Where to find vendors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ask trusted associates for recommendations ▶ Quirk's Marketing Research Review, Researcher SourceBook™ (www.quirks.com) Look for vendors offering the following types of research services: <i>Interviewing-Depth Interviews</i>. ▶ The Blue Book Research Services Directory (www.bluebook.org)
What they will do:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Discuss your research objectives with you in detail ▶ Work with you to develop a sampling strategy ▶ Prepare the in-depth interview guide ▶ Conduct the interviews ▶ <i>If working with full-service firm:</i> Analyze the findings ▶ <i>If working with full-service firm:</i> Prepare a written report of the findings
What you will do:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide vendor with a clear understanding of your research objectives ▶ Set a timeline for the groups ▶ Assist in developing a sampling strategy if needed ▶ You will be responsible for any components of the research not provided by your vendor (e.g., if you hire a data collection firm to conduct the interviews, you may be responsible for analyzing the data collected)
What you should expect to pay:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Will vary widely, depending on vendor and scope of project ▶ Depending on the people you are interviewing, you may need to offer monetary incentives ▶ Low range: \$2,000 to \$4,000. For this cost range, you would be hiring a data collection firm or moderator exclusively for data collection. Assumes 10 in-depths, no incentives, no analysis, and no written report of the findings. ▶ High range: \$14,000 to \$16,000. For this cost range, you would be hiring a full-service research firm for the entire project. Assumes 30 in-depths, incentives, analysis, and a full written report and presentation of the findings.

CONDUCTING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS USING INTERNAL RESOURCES: 1. Developing a Sampling Strategy

The four steps involved in conducting in-depth interviews are: (1) developing a sampling strategy; (2) writing an in-depth interview guide; (3) conducting the interviews; (4) analyzing the data. We will discuss each of these steps in turn.

The first step in conducting in-depth interviews is developing a recruiting strategy: determining **who you should be interviewing**, and figuring out **how to find these people**. Whose beliefs, feelings, and attitudes matter to your OST planning? You need to speak to the right people to get useful answers to your research questions. Use your research goals to help you determine who you should be interviewing.

You can conduct in-depth interviews with any population—school-age children, parents, educators, etc. As described earlier, however, in-depth interviews are a particularly good choice for getting qualitative data in cases where it would be **logistically difficult** to get the people you want to hear from into one room at the same time, or when the topic is **highly sensitive**. In-depths are also an excellent choice for **exploratory interviews with people who are highly knowledgeable about or involved with your research topic**. If the people you plan to contact are parents or students, other research methods (e.g., focus groups, telephone surveys, or in-person interviews) may be more appropriate than in-depth interviews. If you are planning to get information from influential stakeholders, such as area policymakers or educators, or experts in the field of OST program design, in-depth interviews are a highly appropriate choice.

WHO should you interview?

Begin with a clear understanding of the types of people you plan to contact for your research. This will be determined by your research objectives. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- ▶ Why are you conducting this study?
- ▶ What do you want to learn from this research?
- ▶ What decisions will you need to make once the research is completed?
- ▶ Whose feelings, beliefs, attitudes and preferences will help your community make the decisions it needs to make for your OST planning?
- ▶ Who will be most affected by the decisions you will make?

You do not need to be concerned about obtaining a random sample for or getting representative results from in-depth interviews, and in some cases, there may be very few people who meet your eligibility criteria. For example, if you want to interview people in your area who run OST programs, it may be that there is a small enough number of such people that you can try to contact each of them to complete an interview.

As in focus group recruiting, aim for a **diverse mix of respondents**. People with different characteristics may have different feelings or insights about the topic. For example, if you are speaking with area educators, try to speak to older and younger educators; male and female educators; educators with different racial and ethnic backgrounds; teachers of different subjects or different grade levels, etc.

Effective Sampling Strategies

We recommend contacting potential respondents in two stages: (1) at the initial point of contact, you will recruit them to participate in an in-depth interview; and (2) you will contact those who agree to participate in an interview at a predetermined time convenient for them to complete the interview. The strategy you use to make initial contact will depend largely on their characteristics, your personal contacts, and how easy it is for you to get in touch with the people you wish to interview. For example, if you plan to interview area teachers and principals, you may find that it is fairly easy to reach these individuals through area schools.

In the event that you do not have easy access to the population you wish to interview, you may be able to **generate contact information from within the community**. If you know the criteria of the respondents you are hoping to interview, but do not know how to locate them, speak with contacts in the community to see if others are aware of ways to get in touch with these people. Below we present three strategies for locating respondents.

Strategies for Locating Respondents

- ▶ **Intercept recruiting:** Invite potential respondents to complete an interview in person, at local parent groups (e.g. PTO or PTA), business groups (e.g., Chambers of Commerce), local community centers, health clinics, schools, or after-school programs or other public locations. You would explain the purpose of the research to potential respondents and schedule a time (and place, if you choose to do the interviews in person) for the researcher and the respondents to complete the in-depth interview.
- ▶ **Posters or advertisements in the community:** Place an ad in a local newspaper asking people with specific characteristics to contact you about participating in an in-depth interview, or post flyers with contact information in a neighborhood populated by the types of people you want to recruit. **Provide an incentive to call**—for example, give information about the value of the research, the honorarium, etc.
- ▶ **Invite potential participants by telephone:** You can purchase databases of telephone numbers and addresses from research sample vendors, such as Survey Sampling International (SSI) (www.surveysampling.com), and ASDE Survey Sampler (www.surveysampler.com).¹ Such vendors can supply lists for targeted samples (e.g., area businesses; residents with specific characteristics, such as age, income, ethnicity, children under age 18 living in the household, etc.).

¹ *In market research, a “sample” is a portion or subset of a larger group, called a “population,” which is the universe to be sampled.*

2. Writing an In-Depth Interview Guide

An in-depth interview guide is a method for **structuring an interview** and ensuring that important questions will not be forgotten during the interview. You need to **have specific objectives in mind** when you are figuring out what to ask. You should ask questions in **natural, conversational language**—avoid jargon or technical terms your respondents may not know.

In-depth interview guides are very similar to moderator guides. As in moderator guides, **the emphasis is on exploration and the depth of information you can learn**. Skilled in-depth interviewers do not have to stick to the script. In-depth interview guides allow for probing on related issues that might arise during the interview—as well as for the unexpected. When you conduct an in-depth interview, you may wind up getting answers to questions that you didn't know you needed to ask when you were developing the guide. In-depth interview guides are different from moderator guides in that they have fewer components (in-depth interview guides will not include ground rules or participant introductions), and you do not need to be as concerned about questions that might affect a group dynamic, as you are speaking with one person at a time.

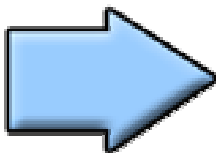
Before you begin writing an in-depth interview guide, ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ What is the specific purpose of the interviews?
- ▶ What information am I interested in exploring?
- ▶ Who needs this information, and what are they going to do with it?

Your research objectives will determine the content of your guide. Your aim is to write questions that, when respondents answer them, will answer your organization's questions and meet your research objectives.

The guide should be kept fairly brief, and should stay focused on your research objectives, so that you are able to get as much in-depth input from each respondent as possible. If you ask too many questions, you will not have enough time to explore these topics fully, and you will not get the full benefit of conducting an in-depth interview. The guide should only include questions directly related to your research objectives. Do not ask personal questions that are not related to the topic.

POINTER



An in-depth interview guide is just that: a guide. In-depth interviewers have the freedom to **follow a respondent's train of thought**, and **reorder the questions** if it better suits the flow of the discussion. Questions may include **suggested probes**—follow-up questions designed to explore specific aspects of an issue. In addition, issues may arise during the interview that could not have been anticipated, and interviewers can ask **additional questions** to find out more about relevant issues.

A sample in-depth interview guide is included on the CD of prototype materials included with this guide. Due to the highly customized nature of in-depth interviews and the broad range of stakeholders communities may wish to interview, however, you may need to ask very different questions to meet your research objectives. On the next pages, we provide general information for writing in-depth interview guides.

COMPONENTS OF AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

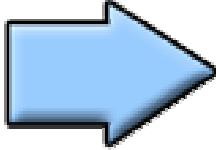
- ▶ **Purpose and introduction:** The introduction of an in-depth interview is very similar to the introduction of a telephone survey: part of its purpose is to convince a potential respondent to complete an interview. Interviewers should introduce themselves and the reason the research is being conducted. The introduction of the topic should not give away too many details about exactly what you'll be asking, but should be sufficiently informative so that the person will agree to speak to you. Emphasize the social value of the research.
- ▶ **Questions:** In an in-depth interview, the questions themselves make up the vast majority of the guide.
- ▶ **Conclusion:** The interviewer ends the interview by asking if respondents have any last suggestions or comments about the topic.

WRITING GOOD IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

- ▶ **Ask open-ended questions:** Questions should reveal what respondents are thinking—not what you think they are thinking. They should encourage an expansive, detailed reply. Use open-ended questions especially at the beginning of an interview to identify themes. Closed-ended questions are not off-limits: use them to narrow responses later in the guide, to bring greater focus to key questions, or clarify and confirm points.
- ▶ **Ask effective probing questions:** Probes reveal greater detail by clarifying or expanding upon earlier responses. Good probing generates conversation: the focus is on the response, not on the person providing the response. Examples include, *What else, what does that mean to you, help me understand*, etc.
- ▶ **Ask respondents to think back:** Ask respondents to “think back” to a specific event and reflect on their personal experience. This strategy invites concrete, specific responses, and grounds respondents in their own experiences, attitudes and beliefs, as opposed to having responses that are based on “what others have said” or popular opinion.
- ▶ **Keep questions simple:** Think of the shortest, most direct way to ask a question. Avoid questions with multiple interpretations, or a question that is really asking two questions at once.
- ▶ **Avoid asking “why”:** “Why” puts respondents on the defensive; these questions can sound like an interrogation, feel inflammatory or rude, or have unpleasant associations (e.g., whining children or accusing parents). Consider alternatives. Instead of “Why do you prefer that type of program,” ask “What are the major reasons you prefer that type of program? What do you like about it?”
- ▶ **Be cautious about giving examples:** By giving examples, you risk limiting respondents’ responses (they may not think beyond the example). Consider using examples as part of your probing questions, after respondents have already given their input.

ORDERING YOUR QUESTIONS

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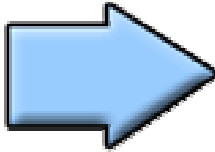
It is not only important what questions you ask and how you ask them—you must also consider **the order in which you ask specific questions**, as this can make a difference in how they're answered.

- ▶ **Move from general to more specific questions:** Asking broader, more general questions first will provide a context and prepare respondents to give more considered responses to the more focused, specific questions that will follow.
- ▶ **Ask positive questions before negative questions:** Ask respondents to talk about both the positive and negative aspects of an experience, situation, program, etc., but ask them to talk about the good parts first—this usually makes people feel more comfortable talking about the bad parts.
- ▶ **Ask unaided questions before aided questions:** Get respondents to respond to a question in their own words before following up with specific probing questions. For example, begin by asking respondents, “What is important to you, in terms of how area children spend their after-school time?” Allow them to respond before going on to ask, “How important are things like cost? Transportation? Safety?”

3. Conducting the Interviews

Ideally, conduct your in-depth interviews in an **environment in which the respondent feels most comfortable**. You may arrange to conduct the interviews by telephone (which is often more convenient for the interviewer, and may be more convenient for the respondent as well), but if you have the time and resources, **let the respondent choose the location** of the interview. This could be their home, workplace, or an appropriate public place (such as a quiet restaurant or coffee shop).

POINTER



When you are conducting in-depth interviews, it's a good idea to **make appointments in advance**. You do not want to feel hurried during the interview; you should foster the image that there is plenty of time to talk about the topic.

To conduct a successful in-depth interview, begin by **introducing yourself and the study**. It is important to establish good rapport with the respondent and put him or her at ease. Your main responsibility is to listen and observe as you guide the respondent through the conversation until all the important issues on the guide are explored.

In-depth interviewers try to be interactive and sensitive to the language and concepts used by the interviewee, and they try to keep the agenda flexible. Here are some **strategies to improve the quality of your in-depth interview experience**:

- ▶ **Active listening.** Listen and rephrase what was said to ensure that you are completely understanding what your respondent is intending.
- ▶ **Patience.** Do not rush the respondent. Allow the respondent to speak freely, while guiding the conversation to cover important issues, or gently re-focusing the conversation if it wanders off track. Always keep in mind that in-depth interview questions are like invitations to share a story. Allow your respondents to tell you theirs.
- ▶ **Flexibility.** Be open to slight deviations from the topic which may require rearranging or reordering the questions, or coming up with new questions.

In-depth Interviewing: Do's and Don'ts

DO:	DON'T:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ DO probe on the last remark made by the respondent▶ DO probe on an idea expressed earlier in the interview▶ DO use encouraging sounds▶ DO introduce new topics as appropriate▶ DO know what it is you want to find out▶ DO ask the right questions to get the information you need▶ DO become very familiar with your interview guide so that you can move back and forth through it as needed.▶ DO offer reassurance that responses are confidential▶ DO spend more time listening than talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ DON'T interview in an environment where there are external interruptions or competing distractions▶ DON'T confuse putting a respondent at ease with bonding with a respondent in a way that will potentially bias the interview▶ DON'T put respondents' remarks into your own words▶ DON'T spend interview time on irrelevant or unrelated topics▶ DON'T jump from one subject to another▶ DON'T use words or phrases the respondent won't understand▶ DON'T ask leading questions▶ DON'T introduce your own perspective into the interview▶ DON'T interrupt respondents unless absolutely necessary

Recording Comments

In order for an in-depth interview to be successful, you must have a way of capturing the information. Your memory of what occurred during the interview is likely to be unreliable. Use as many of the methods below as you can afford; use combined methods when possible. Regardless of whatever additional methods you may use, we recommend that you **always audiotape in-depth interviews**. It is a relatively easy and inexpensive way of capturing information. Audiotapes can help flesh out observations made during field notes, and is necessary for later transcription or translation. Always ask a respondents' permission before audio-taping an interview, particularly when conducting interviews by telephone when respondents are unable to see the equipment. We suggest telling respondents that you will be taking notes as you go along but recording the interview for accuracy.

- ▶ **Field notes:** The interviewer takes detailed notes on respondents' answers. Field notes can be recorded by hand or on a computer, depending on what works best for the interviewer. Notes can be recorded directly into the in-depth guide, with one "completed" interview per respondent.
- ▶ **Audiotape:** The entire interview is captured on audiotape using an audio-recorder. The interviewer should **remind respondents to speak up or speak more clearly** as needed. Keep in mind that, depending on the equipment you are using and the length of your interview, you may need to **flip the cassette tape over or insert a new cassette** to capture the entire interview. Audiotapes should be labeled with the time and date of the interview for the purposes of easy identification and analysis later.

The methods below typically require more **specialized skills**. If you have the resources, consider hiring a professional for these methods. Please see the section on outsourcing in this workbook for more information on how to hire these vendors.

- ▶ **Videotape:** The entire interview is captured on videotape using a video-recorder. Clearly, this is only done when an in-depth interview is being conducted in person.
- ▶ **Transcription:** An interview that has been recorded, either on audio- or videotape, is transcribed verbatim. The transcript is typically a word-processed document that can be used either on the computer, or printed as a hardcopy reference. Transcription is very time-consuming; we recommend that you hire a professional transcriptionist.
- ▶ **Translation:** Your community may choose to conduct interviews with a population that speaks a language other than your own. If this is the case, you will need to have the interview translated. Translation is very time-consuming and requires specialized knowledge; we recommend that you hire a professional translator.

For more detailed information about hiring translators



SEE WORKBOOK D

For more detailed information about hiring professional transcriptionists



SEE WORKBOOK D

4. Analyzing In-depth Interviews

To put it in the most basic terms, analyzing in-depth interviews involves **reviewing the records of the interviews and taking notes to keep track of the findings that are emerging**. Ideally, you will have a written record (either field notes or a transcription) of the interview. You may be reading a transcript while listening to an audiotape.

The biggest danger with qualitative analysis lies in being overwhelmed by the quantity of “verbal data” there is to analyze. The two most common strategies for organizing notes are:

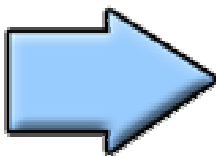
- ▶ **Organizing by question.** In this strategy, you record your notes as “answers to questions.” For example, for the question, *What’s important to you in terms of how your children spend their after-school time*, you would record respondents’ remarks relating to this question. Keep in mind that interviews follow the flow of a conversation more than they follow a script, and so questions may be answered or returned to at different points in the interview. With this strategy, you would record any additional remarks relating to this question in the same place, even if the question is brought up later on in the interview.
- ▶ **Organizing by theme.** In this strategy, you group comments that speak to specific themes (pre-determined and/or that emerge in the course of a interview) together, regardless of the question they relate to. For example, under the theme *Safety*, you might include comments about safety in response to questions about the factors stakeholders consider important in designing OST programs, the barriers that prevent parents from allowing children to participate in activities, etc.

You may also use both strategies concurrently. For example, you could begin by organizing your analysis by question, but switch to a thematic strategy as themes emerge over the course of the interviews. In this workbook, we provide a step-by-step process for organizing by theme.

Guidelines for In-depth Interview Analysis

- ▶ **What words are being used?** When they speak, people often communicate more than they intend. Pay attention to the connotations of the words respondents use. Look out for ambiguous words that can have multiple meanings.
- ▶ **What is the context?** Interviews do not occur in a vacuum; everything respondents say takes place in some kind of context. Sometimes, the context can have a big impact on the findings. For example, comments may be influenced by such factors as widespread media attention about a related issue; local news about education cuts, etc.
- ▶ **To what extent is this belief, feeling, or thought shared?** One of the greatest challenges in qualitative research is knowing how much attention to place on various comments. What are major findings, what are minor findings, and what isn't a finding at all? Here are some simple guidelines to help you make these distinctions:
 - **Frequency and extensiveness.** How often did this perception come up across interviews? How many people share this view? Perceptions or experiences that are widely held may become major findings, whereas a perception that comes up only once may not (unless it's an excellent idea or insight).
 - **Intensity.** How strongly do people feel about this perception? Are respondents passionate about a particular point of view, or are they neutral and blasé?
 - **Specificity.** Are respondents' feelings and beliefs based on specific personal experiences and feelings, or are they talking generally about "what most people say?" A specific anecdote about a getting injured at a particular OST program because of inadequate supervision, for example, should carry more weight than a respondent who says, "Everyone says that place isn't any good."

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What's the big picture? It is very easy to get mired in the details when conducting qualitative analysis. If you begin feeling lost, **take a step back** from the data. Put it aside for a day and return to it with a fresh eye. Time is an important component of the analysis process, enabling you to live with the findings that are emerging, digest their meanings, make connections between issues that may not appear connected at first glance, and achieve new insights.

Process for Analyzing In-Depth Interviews

There are many processes you can use to analyze in-depth interviews. Some may feel more intuitive to you than others. We present the following method for you to start with. Feel free to modify it as needed.

For this method, you can either manually cut, paste, and group hardcopies of interviews, or you can use a computerized word-processing program (such as Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, or OpenOffice Writer). For the purposes of this description, we will assume a computerized system.

- ▶ Copy and paste all the interview notes into a **single document**. You will use this master document to sort and code respondents' comments.
- ▶ **Begin each interview with a new paragraph and a marker.** The marker will include (1) a unique symbol, such as # or * that will not appear elsewhere in the interview text; and (2) identifying the number of the interview. For example, the first interview will begin with * 01, the second interview will begin with * 02, etc. Include any relevant details about the interview here as well (the name of the respondent, his or her characteristics, the date of the interview, etc.).
- ▶ Begin every new question or topic with a new paragraph. **Categorize each paragraph** according to what's being discussed, and precede it with the symbol decided upon above. For example, if the respondent is talking about the types of activities she would be most interested in seeing offered to children, begin this paragraph with * ACTIVITIES * MOST INTERESTED. It is very important that you assign consistent category names to each topic; for example, you will encounter problems with this system if you label half of these responses * ACTIVITIES * MOST INTERESTED and half of them * PROGRAM ACTIVITIES * MOST INTERESTED.
- ▶ **Assign codes to sub-categories within a topic** as well, making a copy of the question: for example, if the respondent above talks about her reasons for believing there is an especially great need for arts and culture activities, you can copy this paragraph and begin it with * ACTIVITIES * MOST INTERESTED * ART-CULTURE.
- ▶ When you have categorized every comment from every respondent, save your document and make a copy of it under a different name (this is done so that you will have a **safe backup copy** to return to in the event that you encounter any problems with your primary record).
- ▶ Open the file and begin **sorting the categorized paragraphs** (e.g., in Microsoft Word, look for the option to Sort under the Table drop-down menu. Your paragraphs will now appear sorted in alphabetical order. You will see the introductory descriptions of each group, and then each major category, with sub-topics grouped under major categories. You may find errors at the end of the document (e.g., partial paragraphs from erroneous hard returns, uncoded topics, etc.). If so, you can fix and/or code these paragraphs now and re-sort your data.
- ▶ At this point, all of the comments have been grouped into categories and sub-categories. You can now **summarize each of these categories** at whatever level you feel is appropriate, and then combine these into a written report of the findings.