Writing the Introduction for Key Informant Interviews

The introduction to any interview serves several purposes:

1. Helps establish the nature of the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent. For example, in interviews dealing with sensitive information it may be important to provide assurances of confidentiality.

2. Establishes a context for the questions and the respondent's answers.

3. Establishes the credibility of the interview. This is important in order to receive respondent cooperation and high quality data. If the interview or interviewer lacks credibility, the respondent may not provide complete or thoughtful answers.

4. Provides a "hook" for the respondent. That is, an incentive or reason for cooperating. The "hook" or incentive may be material (as in cash payments) or intrinsic as in convincing the respondent that their cooperation will help lead to a better community. Generally that the person was selected to be interviewed can be part of the "hook". For example, "You have been identified by our planning committee as a person who can provide us with special insights regarding our community." Or, "Reverend Brown recommended you as someone who can provide our committee with special insights regarding our community."

Parts of the introduction:

1. Interviewer introduction. The interviewer introduces her or himself.

2. Thanks the respondent for consenting to give the interview.

3. Establishes sponsorship for the interview. (This may include an explanation of what CBS is.)

4. Provides a statement of purpose for the interview.

5. Explains what will happen to the information or why the respondent's cooperation is important.

Elements of the introduction should be included in any contact with the respondent. This would include contact prior to the interview by telephone or mail. However, the interviewer should "repeat" the information as an introduction to the interview itself.

A good introduction will gain the interest and cooperation of the respondent without biasing the respondent's answers.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Key Informant Interviews:

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Asking Open-Ended Questions and Probing the Answers

Asking Open-Ended Questions

1. **Use open-ended questions**
   What did you think of the program?
   How did you feel about the conference?
   Where do you get new information?
   What do you like best about the proposed program?

   Be cautious of phrases such as "how satisfied" or "to what extent."

2. **Avoid dichotomous questions**
   These are questions that can be answered with a yes or no.

3. **Focus the questions**
   Sequence from general to specific.

4. **Ask uncued questions first, cued questions second.**
   Uncued: What is needed?
   Cued: Here is a list. Are there additional needs?
   Use of cued questions may unnecessarily limit your interviewee's range of answers.

5. **You may want to ask the respondent to "rank" their answers.**
   "You have identified the following as strengths of your community" (stengths named). "Of these, which is the greatest strength?"

Probing Open-Ended Questions[1]

A probe is used to encourage conversation without influencing the answer. Two kinds of probes are used for open ended questions. One is probing for clarity. The second is probing for either clarity or for additional information.

1. **Probing for clarity**. Because open ended questions tend to be very general (what do you think, why do you feel that way, etc.) respondents tend to answer in a general way, and to use general adjectives to describe situations and opinions. Thus, probing for clarity is often a matter of asking for a more specific response, or an explanation of a term.

[1] This section is adapted from "Introduction to Interviewing: University of Illinois Survey Research Laboratory mimeograph". 1982.

For example: Why did you choose this place to live?

a. I like the water (which water?)
b. I like the location (why?)
c. I like the size (of what?)
d. It's convenient (to what? for whom?)

The best probes for clarity are the ones which tell the respondent exactly what you need to know, or what you want him/her to do:

For example: What do you mean__________________
Could you be more specific about
Could you tell me a little more about

2. **Probing for completeness (additional information).** Once a clear answer has been obtained, the interviewer should probe for additional responses to the question. The best way to do this is to repeat the substance of the question as part of a request for further information.

For example: What else do you like
What other reason did you have

Note that "Is there anything else?" is considered a leading probe because it can easily be answered by a "No". It may also tend to make the respondent feel as though he/she is not really expected to provide further information because it could give the impression that the interviewer is interested in concluding the response.

Each additional response should be probed for clarity as necessary. Only when a clear response has been obtained should the interviewer probe for additional responses. It is important to note that these are two very different kinds of probing.

The interviewer should continue probing for additional responses until the respondent indicates that he/she has nothing else to say on the subject.

3. **Some Kinds of Probes:** Uses pauses and probes.

-Five second pause
-Would you explain further
-Would you give me an example
-I don't understand

Key Informant Interviews

Recording and Summarizing Results

1. During the Interview:

A. Taking Notes

It's important to keep track of what you learned from the interview. You will want to take notes during the interview. Generally, folks being interviewed find note taking a compliment. It communicates that you value what they have to say.

B. Tape Recording the Interview

Sometimes the interviews are taped so the results can be reviewed. Don't let the tape recorder become a crutch. Most interviewers need to take notes to do a good job of interviewing. These notes are used to remind them what comments to follow up on for clarification or more information. Also, mechanical equipment like tape recorders can break down or jam at the darndest times. You may need your notes to fall back on. Near the end of the interview, be sure to allow time for turning the recorder off and giving the respondent the opportunity to talk without their comments being recorded.

C. Using Two Interviewers

Sometimes it's helpful to have two folks conducting the interview. One asks the questions while the other takes notes. The questioner will still need to take notes on points to follow up on with additional questions or probes. Near the end of the interview the interviewer asking the questions should invite the note taker to ask any questions they may have.

There are disadvantages to "teaming up". Some respondents may be shy and "double teaming" them will be intimidating. Also, using two persons to conduct a single interview is expensive. Not as many interviews can be conducted by the same number of persons.

D. End of Interview Summary

At the conclusion of the interview, take a moment to go over your notes. Then, using the notes, give the respondent a 2 to 3 minute summary of what you've heard them say. This gives you a chance to make sure that you have understood what the respondent has said.

2. Immediately After the Interview Review Your Notes

Take a few minutes as soon after the interview as possible to carefully review your notes. This is the best time to clarify your notes and add comments which you did not have time to add during the interview. If time allows, it is also a good time to prepare your summary for discussion by your program planning group.

3. Strategies for Presenting Results to Your Program Planning Group

There's no one best way to present results.. .often a combination of strategies will work best. It is helpful to decide on strategies in advance.

A. Oral Reports

One approach is for each interviewer to present a brief oral summary of each interview they have conducted. This can get tedious if each person presents several interview results in succession. One way to deal with this would be to use a round robin approach where each interviewer presents the results of one interview which is followed by every other interviewer in turn. This approach works especially well if the round of interviews tend to have something in common. For example, if there are several area schools and several interviewers interviewed school personnel, it might make sense to present all of the "school" interviews in succession.

B. Written Reports

Brief written summaries can also be used. They're especially helpful when the planning group members can receive these in advance of a group meeting. **Group members will need to make a commitment to review this information in advance.** It does little good to send out summaries in advance if group members don't take the responsibility to review this information prior to the meeting!

C. Index Cards

For years researchers have used index cards to capture the main points of open-ended interviews like key informant interviews. The value of the cards is they can be sorted so that similar interview results can be put together. One approach which has worked well with planning groups is to post cards with similar results or common themes on the wall. Then all of the members of the group can circulate around the room and get a sense of the total findings from the interviews.

An approach similar to index cards is to use summary forms like the one shown below:

Question asked:
Person Interviewed: Interviewer:

Brief Summary of Major Points: (Put direct quotes in quotation marks)