

Planning and conducting interviews

Plan your interview

Identify who you want to interview and why.

This will depend on why you are conducting the interviews. If you are trying to get a broad sense of the issues encountered when using a service, it may be appropriate to interview a representative sample of users. If you are trying to understand the barriers to using a service, you may wish to increase representation of individuals with particular needs.

Choose your structure.

You may want to ask everyone the same specific questions (structured) or explore issues more informally (unstructured). The two approaches can also be combined (semi-structured).

Setting up and conducting your interview

Topic guides for interviewers

A topic guide should outline the questions the interviewer needs to ask, and provide instructions on how to capture feedback, for example.

- Keep your questions simple, focused, and easy to understand. Use non-technical language, and keep sentences short. Avoid words that are open to interpretation; for example, use 'daily' or 'weekly' rather than 'often' or 'usually'.
- For closed questions, avoid leading questions. These are questions that prompt or encourage a specific answer; for example, 'How satisfied are you with the service?'.
- For open questions, try to encourage full responses. If the participant's answer is short, the interviewer can reply with 'Can you tell me more about that?' or leave silence for them to elaborate.
- Ask one thing at a time. For example, split 'Did you find the session helpful and interesting?' into two questions, because "helpful" and "interesting" are not the same thing.

- Focus on the objectives of your interviews. It can be tempting to take advantage of the opportunity to gather information that is peripheral to your immediate objective. For example, you may want to ask about other aspects of your service, test interest in an event or project, or gauge opinion on a particular issue. This will only make your survey longer and less appealing to participants.

Consider if you can preserve anonymity.

Interviews can be carried out by a trained member of staff, but it is better to commission an external evaluator or use trained volunteers. Respondents will be more likely to give honest answers.

Clarify how you will capture information.

You could take notes or record the conversation. Remember that you will need permission to do both of these things before conducting the interview, and there will be data protection implications for the information you collect.

Remain neutral, but show empathy and respect.

Make eye contact and be aware of your body language. Try to build rapport and break down barriers between you and the interviewee.

Make notes as you go, also capturing non-verbal communication, and seek clarification or probe further if needed.

Let the interviewee know how and when you propose to share the findings of the interview.

Source: www.impactsupport.org