

Policy Engagement Training Programme

Module 4: Managing the Interview Process

Video: **Managing the Interview Process**

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Transcription

Let's consider how you would manage the interview process. When managing the interview process, the first step is to think about structure. So, when you're starting out, you'll introduce yourself. And you'll want to emphasize that you value the participation of your interviewee. So, ask if they need anything before starting the interview. If there's anything unclear, anything you can clarify about the informed consent or what's going to happen with their data? Anything like that you want to clarify at the outset so that they don't have it burdening their minds during the interview itself.

You'll also want to clarify in your introductory comments in the interview about the participation being voluntary and ensuring that any consents have already been signed. Ideally, you would take care of that before the interview itself, like when they actually sign up so that it's not an issue. But if it hasn't been covered already, make sure that you complete the informed consent procedures before starting the recording. And then the other thing to think about is clarifying what's going to happen with their data.

So, just reminding them what the plan is, what the point of the research is, that kind of thing, to make sure they understand what their participation involves, what they're agreeing to before they actually start to speak on the record in your interview. Another step in the interview process is that you want to explain how the interview will be structured. "We will be doing this and then this". You could introduce the kinds of questions that you're going to be asking, and approximately how long the interview will take, so that these aren't things that they're wondering about while the interview is taking place. Once you actually get going with the interview, the next step will be to start with the basic, easy-to-answer questions. So, you don't want to dive right in with the toughest, most sensitive questions. You want to start easy, let people get more comfortable, and work up to the more challenging questions over time once you feel confident that the participant is feeling secure and comfortable. Then you can start to introduce some more challenging questions if you have them in your interview guide.

When you're finishing the interview, make sure that you express gratitude in the most genuine way possible. Show that you value their participation, and you can remind them about what happens next. So, if there's going to be a follow-up data collection or anything else, you would mention that at the end of the interview as part of the closure process. Now, let's think about the process of the interview itself. What can you do to make it an effective interview? The first point is to ensure that you have a relaxed pace. Don't give the participant the impression that you're nervous or that you're bombarding them with questions too quickly. Ask the questions in a calm, clear, and understandable way. Don't rush; nobody likes to be hurried, and it's not helpful. So, take it easy, ask questions in a relaxed manner, and give participants time to think through their answers as well. Don't rush them or jump in if they pause. Just relax, take the time, let the question breathe, and let them answer..

And then, during the interview process, if they start to wander off-topic, gently coax them back onto the main focus for your evaluation. You may need to politely interject if the topic is getting too far away from what's useful. It doesn't help to let them ramble on and on about something you're not going to be able to use. So, maintain focus and relevance. It's fine if the discussion drifts a little bit, *"okay, I'm not going to be able to use this at all because it's off-topic"*. But you want to pull it back in as soon as it's clear that it's off-topic and not useful for your main evaluation purpose.

One of the tips I'd offer is that you can redirect the conversation gently using statements such as *"going back to my earlier question about"* as a way to redirect, or *"looking once again at"* or *"your comment made me think of"*, and then bring it back to the relevant topic in a conversational and relaxed way.

This type of redirection must be approached with care because overly assertive interventions can potentially cause the participant to feel uncomfortable or discouraged. Such actions may disrupt the natural flow of the interview if handled abruptly, with statements like, *"That's off-topic"* or *"No, that's not what I asked."* Therefore, it is advisable to avoid such approaches. As previously mentioned, initiating the interview with broader, straightforward questions is recommended.

You can probe for depth and detail, follow up, and utilize follow-up questions in general to clarify the how and why that underpin the answers provided by individuals. Utilize the probing aspect of interviews to ensure that your questions are thoroughly addressed and can be effectively utilized for your evaluation. When posing your questions, ensure that you are familiar with them to the extent that you do not need to mechanically read them off a card or similar medium, enabling you to maintain a natural conversational flow. Avoid

giving the impression that you are simply reciting questions from a script; strive to keep the interaction natural.

That is important for creating a more relaxed atmosphere, facilitating a natural flow of discussion that resembles a typical conversation. Thus, withholding your most challenging questions until the participant is more at ease is advisable. Additionally, it's essential to consider whether any of these questions are particularly sensitive. If so, it's best to avoid broaching them until rapport has been established, preventing the participant from becoming defensive. Defensive reactions can hinder open discussion and compromise the quality of the interview data obtained. These are the key strategies for effectively addressing and managing a successful interview process.