CONDUCTING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS:
A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input

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What is an In-Depth Interview?

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. For example, we might ask participants, staff, and others associated with a program about their experiences and expectations related to the program, the thoughts they have concerning program operations, processes, and outcomes, and about any changes they perceive in themselves as a result of their involvement in the program.

When are In-Depth Interviews Appropriate?

In-depth interviews are useful when you want detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors or want to explore new issues in depth. Interviews are often used to provide context to other data (such as outcome data), offering a more complete picture of what happened in the program and why. For example, you may have measured an increase in youth visits to a clinic, and through in-depth interviews you find out that a youth noted that she went to the clinic because she saw a new sign outside of the clinic advertising youth hours. You might also interview a clinic staff member to find out their perspective on the clinic's "youth friendliness."

In-depth interviews should be used in place of focus groups if the potential participants may not be included or comfortable talking openly in a group, or when you want to distinguish individual (as opposed to group) opinions about the program. They are often used to refine questions for future surveys of a particular group.

What are the Advantages and Limitations of In-Depth Interviews?

The primary advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys. They also may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information—people may feel more comfortable having a conversation with you about their program as opposed to filling out a survey. However, there are a few limitations and pitfalls, each of which is described below.

Prone to bias: Because program or clinic staff might want to "prove" that a program is working, their interview responses might be biased. Responses from community members and program participants could also be biased due to their stake in the program or for a number of other reasons. Every effort should be made to design a data collection effort, create instruments, and conduct interviews to allow for minimal bias.

Can be time-intensive: Interviews can be a time-intensive evaluation activity because of the time it takes to conduct interviews, transcribe them, and analyze the results. In planning

your data collection effort, care must be taken to include time for transcription and analysis of this detailed data.

Interviewer must be appropriately trained in interviewing techniques: To provide the most detailed and rich data from an interviewee, the interviewer must make that person comfortable and appear interested in what they are saying. They must also be sure to use effective interview techniques, such as avoiding yes/no and leading questions, using appropriate body language, and keeping their personal opinions in check.

Not generalizable: When in-depth interviews are conducted, generalizations about the results are usually not able to be made because small samples are chosen and random sampling methods are not used. In-depth interviews however, provide valuable information for programs, particularly when supplementing other methods of data collection. It should be noted that the general rule on sample size for interviews is that when the same stories, themes, issues, and topics are emerging from the interviewees, then a sufficient sample size has been reached.

What is the Process for Conducting In-Depth Interviews?

The process for conducting in-depth interviews follows the same general process as is followed for other research: plan, develop instruments, collect data, analyze data, and disseminate findings. More detailed steps are given below.

1. Plan

- Identify stakeholders who will be involved.

- Identify what information is needed and from whom. (See "What are Potential Sources of Information?")

- List stakeholders to be interviewed. Identify stakeholder groups from national, facility, and beneficiary levels and then identify individuals within those groups—additional interviewees may be identified during data collection. Determine sample if necessary.

- Ensure research will follow international and national ethical research standards, including review by ethical research committees. For more information, please see the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects, available at http://www.cioms.ch/frame_guidelines_nov_2002.htm.

2. *Develop Instruments*

- Develop an interview protocol—the rules that guide the administration and implementation of the interviews. Put simply, these are the instructions that are followed for each interview, to ensure consistency between interviews, and thus increase the reliability of the findings. The following instructions for the interviewer should be included in the protocol:

  ◦ What to say to interviewees when setting up the interview;

  ◦ What to say to interviewees when beginning the interview, including ensuring informed consent and confidentiality of the interviewee (see Appendix 1 for an example);

  ◦ What to say to interviewees in concluding the interview;

  ◦ What to do during the interview (Example: Take notes? Audiotape? Both?); and

  ◦ What to do following the interview (Example: Fill in notes? Check audiotape for clarity? Summarize key information for each? Submit written findings?).

- Develop an interview guide that lists the questions or issues to be explored during the interview and includes an informed consent form. There should be no more than 15 main questions to guide the interview, and probes should be included where helpful (see "Interview Question Tips"). An example is provided in Appendix 1. Please note that you will likely need interview guides for each group of stakeholders, as questions may differ.

- Where necessary, translate guides into local languages and test the translation.

Interview Question Tips

- Questions should be open-ended rather than closed-ended. For example, instead of asking "Do you know about the clinic's services?" ask "Please describe the clinic's services."
- You should ask factual question before opinion questions. For example, ask, "What activities were conducted?" before asking, "What did you think of the activities?"
- Use probes as needed. These include:
  ◦ Would you give me an example?
  ◦ Can you elaborate on that idea?
  ◦ Would you explain that further?
  ◦ I'm not sure I understand what you're saying.
  ◦ Is there anything else?

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3. Train Data Collectors

- Identify and train interviewers (see "Training Tips for Data Collectors"[1]). Where necessary, use interviewers that speak the local language.

Training Tips for Data Collectors

Staff, youth program participants, or professional interviewers may be involved in data collection. Regardless of what experience data collectors have, training should include:
- An introduction to the evaluation objectives,
- A review of data collection techniques,
- A thorough review of the data collction items and instruments,
- Practice in the use of the instruments,
- Skill-building exercises on interviewing and interpersonal communication, and
- Discussion of ethical issues.

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4. Collect Data

- Set up interviews with stakeholders (be sure to explain the purpose of the interview, why the stakeholder has been chosen, and the expected duration of the interview).

- Seek informed consent of the interviewee (written or documented oral). Re-explain the purpose of the interview, why the stakeholder has been chosen, expected duration of the interview, whether and how the information will be kept confidential, and the use of a note taker and/or tape recorder.

- If interviewee has consented, conduct the interview.

- Summarize key data immediately following the interview.

- Verify information given in interviews as necessary. For example, if an interviewee says that a clinic has a policy of not providing services to anyone under 16, you should verify that information on your own with the clinic.

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[1] Adamchak, S. et.al. (2000). *A Guide To Monitoring and Evaluating Adolescent Reproductive Health Programs.* Available at http://www.pathfind.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Publications_FOCUS_Guides_and_Tools

5. *Analyze Data*

- Transcribe and/or review data.
- Analyze all interview data (see "Tips on Analyzing Interview Responses"[2]).

Tips on Analyzing Interview Responses

- Read through the interview responses and look for patterns or themes among the partcipants.
- If you get a variety of themes, see if you can group them in any meaningful way, such as by type of participant. You may, for example, find that younger participants tend to think and feel differently from older ones or that men and women respond differently.
- You can also identify the responses that seem to have been given with enthusiasm, as opposed to those that the participants answered in only a few words.

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6. *Disseminate Findings*

- Write report (see "How are In-Depth Interviews Presented?").
- Solicit feedback from interviewees and program stakeholders.
- Revise.
- Disseminate to interviewees, program stakeholders, funders, and the community as appropriate.

What are Potential Sources of Information?

In-depth interviews typically rely on multiple sources of information to provide as complete a picture as possible. Information sources could include:

- Policy Makers
- Project Staff
- Clinic Staff
- Program Participants/Clients
- Community Members

When choosing interviewees, one should consider a sample that best represents the diverse stakeholders and opinions of those stakeholders. The general rule about interviewing is that you will know when you have done enough when you hear the same information from a number of stakeholders.

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[2] University of California San Francisco's Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. (1998). *Good Questions, Better Answers.* California Department of Health Services and Northern California Grantmakers AIDS Task Force. Available at http://goodquestions.ucsf.edu

How are In-Depth Interviews Presented?

In-depth interviews are flexible in that they can be presented in a number of ways—there is no specific format to follow. However, like all evaluation results, justification and methodology of the study should be provided, as well as any supporting information (i.e. copies of instruments and guides used in the study). In-depth interview data may stand alone or be included in a larger evaluation report. If presented as a stand-alone report, the following outline is suggested:

1. Introduction and Justification
2. Methodology
   a. How was the process carried out? (Describe the process of selecting the interviewees and conducting the interviews.)
   b. What assumptions are there (if any)?
   c. Are there any limitations with this method?
   d. What instruments were used to collect data? (You may want to include some or all in the appendix.)
   e. What sample(s) is/are being used?
   f. Over which period of time was this data collected?
3. Results
   a. What are the key findings?
   b. What were the strengths and limitations of the information?
   c. Where and how are the results similar and dissimilar to other findings (if other studies have been done)?
4. Conclusion and Recommendations
5. Appendices (including the interview guide(s))

In presenting results of in-depth interviews, you need to use care in presenting the data and use qualitative descriptors rather than try to "quantify" the information. You might consider using qualifiers such as "the prevalent feeling was that . . .," or "several participants strongly felt that . . .," or even "most participants agreed that . . ." Numbers and percentages sometimes convey the impression that results can be projected to a population, and this is not within the capabilities of this qualitative research procedure.

Providing quotes from respondents throughout the report adds credibility to the information. Do be careful that you don't identify the respondent or provide quotes that are easily traced back to an individual, especially if you have promised confidentiality. For example, if you have interviewed only one youth as part of your sample, and in the report you note that, "one respondent described the program as having no impact on accessibility for youth because the services are 'way too expensive for someone my age,'" it would be clear to the reader that the quote was from the youth. Ensure that you have a good sample of interviewees and/or ask permission from the interviewee before including quotes such as these.

Data can be displayed in tables, boxes, and figures to make it easier to read. For example, if you have a number of quotes that you want to highlight, you might want to display them in a box like the one below.

Examples of youth friendly staff interactions

"She taught me a lot and made funny jokes." — female, age 16
"He said to feel at home with a big smile." — male, age 14
"They greeted me with a smile and showed me where to go." — female, age 17

You could also highlight recommendations made by your key stakeholders in a table such as this.

Key Stakeholder Recommendations for Improving ASRH

1. Train more outreach peers so that they can reach more youth outside the clinics.
2. Provide more assistance in implementing action plans for clinic improvements.
3. Community mobilization efforts are needed to enhance future work.

Where Can More Information on In-Depth Interviews be Found?

Adamchak, S., et. al. (2000). *A Guide To Monitoring and Evaluating Adolescent Reproductive Health Programs.* Available at http://www.pathfind.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Publications_FOCUS_Guides_and_Tools

Patton, Michael Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Prairie Research Associates, Inc. (2001). *The In-Depth Interview.* Prairie Research Associates, Inc. (TechNotes). Available at http://www.pra.ca/resources/indepth.pdf

United States Agency for International Development's Center for Development Information and Evaluation. (1996). *Conducting Key Informant Interviews.* (Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS) Available at http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/usaid_eval/pdf_docs/pnabs541.pdf

University of California San Francisco's Center for AIDS Prevention Studies. (1998). *Good Questions, Better Answers.* California Department of Health Services and Northern California Grantmakers AIDS Task Force. Available at http://goodquestions.ucsf.edu

Appendix 1: Sample Key Stakeholder Interview Guide

The following is an example of an interview guide that you might use with key staff members of your program, to determine what they found to be the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative. Interview guides should contain an introduction (including informed consent), a set of questions, and closing comments, as illustrated in this example.

Introduction Key Components:	I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is _____ and I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in the African Youth Alliance (AYA) project. Specifically, as one of the components of our overall program evaluation we are assessing program effectiveness in order to capture lessons that can be used in future interventions.
• Thank you	
• Your name	
• Purpose	
• Confidentiality	The interview should take less than an hour. I will be taping the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down. Because we're on tape, please be sure to speak up so that we don't miss your comments.
• Duration	
• How interview will be conducted	
• Opportunity for questions	All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with research team members and we will ensure that any information we include in our report does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.
• Signature of consent	
	Are there any questions about what I have just explained?
	Are you willing to participate in this interview?
	_____ _____ _____
	Interviewee Witness Date
	_____
	Legal guardian (if interviewee is under 18)

Questions • No more than 15 open-ended questions • Ask factual before opinion • Use probes as needed	1. What YFS **strategies** (e.g., facility assessment and quality improvement process, other), **interventions** (preservice training, facility strengthening, training of facility supervisors, training of outreach staff, NTCDs, service providers, community and stakeholder mobilization, other), and **tools** were used (facility assessment tool, curricula, etc)? Please list. 2. Which of these strategies, interventions and tools would you consider to be key program elements? Please explain. 3. To what extent did participation in the AYA UNFPA, Pathfinder, PATH partnership advance or hinder project implementation? Please explain. 4. What worked well? Please elaborate. 5. What would you do differently next time? Please explain why. 6. What strategies, interventions, tools, etc., would you recommend be sustained and/or scaled up? Please provide a justification for your response. 7. What strategies, interventions, tools should be discontinued? Why? 8. What were some barriers, if any, that you encountered? Staff turnover? Lack of key support? Lack of technical assistance? 9. How did you overcome the barrier(s)? 10. What effect, if any, do you feel the AYA project had on the community in which you work? Increased use of services by youth? Increased knowledge of youth-friendly services by clinic staff? Changes to the clinic(s) to make them more youth friendly? 11. What recommendations do you have for future efforts such as these?
Closing Key Components: • Additional comments • Next steps • Thank you	Is there anything more you would like to add? I'll be analyzing the information you and others gave me and submitting a draft report to the organization in one month. I'll be happy to send you a copy to review at that time, if you are interested. Thank you for your time.