



Interviews

Interviews can be in-depth, structured or semi-structured. In an in-depth Interview, the interviewer and the interviewee discuss a definite but possibly broad topic for less than an hour. The questions are not planned in advance and specific issues that arise can be discussed in more detail. In structured Interviews all the questions are formulated in advance. In this way, it is easy to gain answers to issues of special importance. Analysis of the results is relatively easy to carry out and the information reached can be readily quantified. In semi-structured Interviews, the majority of questions are created during the Interview, allowing both the interviewer and interviewee the flexibility to probe for details or specific issues. A range of pre-set topics is covered during the Interview to obtain feedback or delve into an issue or problem. Structured and semi-structured Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or by telephone. Interviewing key persons of a community is a good way to gain valuable information for planning and to identify possible stakeholders and groups.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Interviewers should be able to generate trust in interviewees.
- Good listening skills and an open approach are important.
- Interviewers should be highly skilled especially in in-depth interviewing.

Equipment

- A tape recorder is necessary if Interviews are to be recorded (common with in-depth Interviews).

Time

- Interviews may require a lot of time in total, but individual Interviews should preferably be kept short (20–30 minutes). In-depth Interviews normally take less than an hour.

Useful sources of information

References

- Reference manual for public involvement. J. Barker et al. (1999). 2nd edn. Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Authority, London.

Web

- Information on how to carry out semi-structured interviews: www.fao.org

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★★

INVOLVING:

PARTNERSHIP:

Strengths

- Interviews provide a more in-depth understanding of people's ideas on the given issue compared to self-completed questionnaires.
- They can be good in bringing about interaction.
- They can be used to evaluate potential participants in other planning events.
- If the sample is taken carefully a good cross-section of people's opinions can be obtained.
- In-depth Interviews can generate a lot of new, high quality ideas.
- Structured Interviews are quick and cost effective in comparison with other types of interviews.
- They can be relatively cheap.

Weaknesses

- A lot of time and resources can be spent with few people.
- Expertise is often needed to prepare the framework for the Interview.
- In-depth Interviews require a highly skilled interviewer and are more expensive than Focus groups.

Continued overleaf

Weaknesses continued:

- Structured interviews allow only minimum input from the interviewees.
- Analysis of qualitative data produced in in-depth or semi-structured interviews requires special skills.

- Public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making by United States Department of Transportation: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/keypers.htm

Training

- The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research provides courses on Interview Questionnaire Design: www.ccsr.ac.uk

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox