



## Volunteer Interviewers in a Phone Interview: What to Consider

- Recruit enough volunteer interviewers. Current and former committee members and former program participants make good volunteer interviewers. Recruit a few extras and train them so if someone gets sick or drops out because they don't like the job, there will be sufficient interviewers to finish the task.
- Plan for a certain number of interviews per hour. After the interview is developed and pre-tested, estimate the amount of time an interviewer needs by at least doubling the amount of time to account for administrative tasks, wrong numbers, etc. Dialing and even getting the person to the phone all takes time.
- To increase the reliability of the data, volunteer interviewers need to be trained. This is an extremely important step in conducting this study. A combination of mini lectures, discussions, and lots of role playing with other interviewers at the other end of a telephone, comprise the best way to prepare volunteer interviewers.
- Volunteer interviewers need to know how to handle a variety of usual problems so that:
  - *each volunteer interviewer* handles the problems in the same way each time they occur, and
  - *all volunteer interviewers* handle them in the same way.

Typical problems include respondents who want the interviewer's opinion, respondents who have many extra ideas, and respondents who want to talk about other issues.

- Volunteer Interviewers need to know they have to be consistent. The protocol should include how to handle:
  - respondents who don't understand questions
  - respondents who give irrelevant answers
  - respondents who can't decide between two answers
  - respondents who don't wish to participate
- Protocol also insists that the volunteer interviewers be neutral and therefore they need to learn that they can't agree or disagree with answers, or suggest answers. They also need to learn how to get past gatekeepers, people who don't think the respondent should cooperate with the interview. Other family members and secretaries often fall into this category. Role-playing is an excellent device to use to teach these skills. Additionally, volunteer interviewers also should know something about the ethics of their role in collecting data for a scientific project.



- To conduct the study, consider renting a bank of phones, for example, at a local emergency center or university, that volunteer interviewers can use for a specified period of time to conduct the study. It increases the reliability of the data if volunteer interviewers can work around a large table, or group of tables, in one room. Then a project manager can supervise the work, answer their questions, recall the need to be consistent and neutral, assist them as needed in providing clean forms or providing new telephone numbers, etc. This format is preferable to letting each interviewer go off to a separate office or home.
- Often volunteer interviewers are willing to make calls only if they can call from their home and then, only within their own area code. Here cost overrides reliability of data.
- Other ideas for using volunteer interviewers in evaluation and needs assessment can be found in other Tipsheets on the web site. Go to [Subject Index](#), click on **Other Issues**, and look for the list under **Volunteer Involvement**.

#### Other Resources

Tipsheet #67: A Phone Interview: Steps to Increase Response from Your Target Audience  
(<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS67.pdf>)

PA Ex #3 (Telephone Survey): New Animal Shelter Design and Expansion  
(<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX3.pdf>)

PA Ex #15 (Telephone Survey): Better Kid Care Satellite Training  
(<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX15.pdf>)

For further reading, consult:

Frey, James H. 1983. *Survey Research By Telephone*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Groves, Robert M., Paul P. Biemer, Lars E. Lyberg, James T. Massey, William L. Nicholls II, and Joseph Waksberg. 1988. *Telephone Survey Methodology*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Salant, Priscilla, and Don A. Dillman. 1994. *How To Conduct Your Own Survey*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Available at: <http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS65.pdf>

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