

Activity 3.2: Creating Effective Interview Questions

Tools Needed

T 3.4: Tips For Creating Effective Interview Questions

Materials Needed

Butcher Paper
Markers

Key Terms

Interview Questions
Interview Guide
Open Ended Questions
Closed Ended Questions

Intended Participants

Members and Staff of your Organization

Time Needed

1 Hour, 15 minutes

Purpose of Activity

This activity is designed to guide your group through the process of creating effective interview questions. First participants will learn how to create open ended vs. close ended questions, and will review other interview question tips. Then your group will brainstorm interview questions to use in your interview guide.

By the end of Activity Participants Will

- Understand the difference between close-ended vs. open ended questions
- Understand how to create effective interview questions
- Develop a list of interview questions to use in your interview guide

Before this Activity Participants Will Need to

Be updated about your organization's research plan and timeline
Understand how interviews fit into your overall research project

Part I: Introducing Open vs. Closed Ended Questions (20 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions

1. Explain to the group that today we will be creating an interview guide to use in our research, but before we do that we are going to review some important tips that will help us design good questions for our guide.
2. Introduce the group to the concept of open vs. closed-ended questions. Describe that interviews are meant to inspire stories and conversation, so usually we want to avoid asking questions that can be answered by just a few words (closed ended questions).
3. Ask for an example of a closed ended question from the group. If you need to, give an example: "If you ask "do you like living here?" How will people usually answer? With a yes or no." How could you change that question to get a more thorough response: "What do you like and dislike about living here?"
4. Next ask participants to work in partners, and ask them to create three examples of closed- ended questions vs. open-ended questions that they might ask their neighbors if they wanted to learn about their landlord. Give participants 5 minutes to create questions.
5. While participants are writing questions, prepare two sheets of butcher paper with "open- ended questions" and "closed-ended questions" written at the top of the two sheets.
6. Ask participants to share the questions they came up with and record them on the two sheets of butcher paper.

Part II: Interview Tips (25 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions

1. Handout the Tips For Creating Effective Interview Questions sheet (Tool 3.4) to everyone.
2. Go through the interview tips as a big group, be sure to cover:
 - a. Using “how” questions vs. “why” questions.
 - b. How to use clarification questions and probing questions.
3. Go through the “Questions to Avoid” section as a big group and clarify the following:
 - a. How to avoid leading questions.
 - b. How to avoid using loaded terms.
 - c. How to avoid using questions with multiple elements.
4. Discuss any other questions that arise from the handout.
5. Ask a participant to remind the group about the main difference between open-ended and closed ended questions. If the group does not know, explain again.
6. Next split into 3 or 4 groups (depending on how many categories of info you need) and give each group one category. Make sure each group has pen and paper, and ask for each group to have a note-taker.
7. Give each group 5-7 minutes to brainstorm questions.
8. Have each group share their questions with the larger group, flag the questions that are closed-ended, leading, or have multiple elements as you go, and record on butcher paper.
9. Debrief. Which questions can be used for interview guide? Which are less effective? Why? What questions are similar? What themes are developing?
10. After the training: type up the questions as a first draft of your interview guide (see Tool 3.5: Interview Guide Template for guidance).

Part III: Brainstorming Questions (35 minutes)

Facilitator Instructions

1. Before the meeting, write your research questions (Activity 2.1 “Developing Research Goals and Questions”) on butcher paper, along with 3 or 4 key categories of information you need to collect in order to answer your research questions.

For example: From the VOCAL-NY Case study, the categories would be:

- Syringe Exchange Programs
- Police harassment
- Access to clean syringes
- Experience with harm reduction programs

2. Explain that this next activity is for you to brainstorm interview questions to use in your interview guide.