Unit 25

Interviewing in inventorying

Published in 2016 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

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lesson plan

Duration:

3 hours

Objectives:

Participants will be able to discuss the art of interviewing, prepare an interview, ask the right questions and listen actively, as well as conclude an interview correctly and courteously.

Description:

This unit describes and discusses techniques to assist an interviewer in developing and conducting interviews with community members. It discusses the preparatory requirements for conducting an interview, the equipment necessary, the choice of places to complete an interview, and possibilities for recording the interview. It reviews approaches to conducting interviews (e.g. structured, semi-structured or more open-ended interview styles) and focus group discussions, and how the choice of interview style can affect the outcome. The unit further includes an analysis of biases that interviewers may impose upon subjects if unaware of the positions that they occupy, and how these biases may be circumvented.

Proposed sequence:

* Begin with the Unit 25 PowerPoint on Interviewing techniques, followed by Exercises 1-3. Alternatively the facilitator could choose to do each exercise immediately after its corresponding section of the PowerPoint presentation.
* Exercise 1: Planning an interview: Establish an interview topic and develop an interview plan
* Exercise 2: Conducting an interview: Conduct an interview
* Exercise 3: Evaluating an interview: Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the interview processes and the different techniques and styles used. Discuss the overall experience of conducting an interview and the process of being interviewed

Supporting documents:

* Unit 25 PowerPoint presentation

Source: Corbett J. and White K. 2010. *Unit Trainer Notes*. Unit M14U02, Module M14: Documentation; in “Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication”. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy.

Notes and suggestions

Facilitators may wish to combine this unit with the previous one (Unit 24) on audio recording. In this way, participants can practise their audio-recording skills by recording the interviews planned in this unit.

This unit is adapted from CTA. 2010. *Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication*. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy (ISBN: 978-92-9081-446-7).

Unit 25

Interviewing in inventorying

Facilitator’s narrative

###### Slide 1.

Interviewing in inventorying

###### Slide 2.

In this presentation…

This unit describes techniques to assist the interviewer in developing and delivering interviews with community members. It discusses the preparatory requirements for conducting the interview. It covers the equipment necessary, the choice of places to complete the interview, and possibilities for recording the interview. The unit discusses approaches to conducting interviews (e.g. structured, semi-structured or more open-ended interview styles), focus group discussions, and how the choice of interview style can affect the outcome. The unit includes an analysis of biases that interviewers may impose upon subjects if interviewers are unaware of the positions they occupy and how these biases may be circumvented.

More generally, the interview process is an art, not a science. Interviews are a way to explore and collect stories and knowledge concerning an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) element. The interview provides a place for interviewees to share their experiences as they remember them and for the interviewer to encourage the sharing of those memories. For the interviewer and interviewee to get the most out of an interview, the questions are of central importance. It is crucial to prepare for the interview by becoming familiar with the persons who are being interviewed and the types of information that are of interest. Of equal importance is having the skills to collect the information that is shared; this may involve taking notes or recording the interview.

###### Slide 3.

Preparing for the interview

In many ways, a good interview is like a good conversation. However, it is important for the interviewer to clearly understand the topic and purpose of the interview to ensure that the conversation is productive. To prepare the interviewer should:

* Understand exactly the topic of discussion. The topic is often determined by the reasons for conducting the interview in the first place. This likely involves input from community members on what topics they feel are important in terms of the ICH element.
* Draft a preliminary set of questions discussing the relevant information and consult them throughout the interview. While it is important to know which questions are key, do not be tied to the list. The questions are meant to help focus and guide the interview.

###### Slide 4.

Making initial contact

Before conducting an interview, potential interviewees need to be contacted to see if they are willing to be interviewed. A well-prepared interviewer understands the purpose of the interview in terms of the inventory, and is able to explain this clearly to the potential interviewee. After understanding the purpose of the inventory, an interviewee is more likely to feel comfortable with the interviewer and, therefore, more willing to participate. Conversely, a poor explanation of the purpose for the interview may confuse the prospective interviewee; this may make the interviewer appear unprofessional and may discourage the potential interviewee from participating in an interview.

When initial contact is made, it is important that the potential interviewee be informed of:

* information about the inventory (its purpose, objectives);
* how long the interview is expected to last and where it will take place;
* how the interview will be used once it is completed;
* who will be present at the interview; and
* what is expected of the interviewee (including sometimes the types of questions that may be asked).

More generally, it is a good idea for the interviewer to take a little time at the beginning to introduce themselves and to establish a rapport – a feeling of comfort and connectedness – with the person being interviewed.

###### Slide 5.

Equipment

Generally an interview is recorded or collected in some way so the knowledge that has been shared is not lost. Before beginning the interview, it is vital that the interviewer be familiar with the equipment to prevent problems from occurring during the interview. Equipment can include audio recorders, microphones or video cameras, or even simply a notepad.

Interviewers should ensure the following preparations:

* Learn the basics: power on/off, audio levels, activating the recording function and auxiliary power supplies.
* Ensure that the batteries are fully charged the night before the interview. It is also a good idea to carry back-up batteries.
* Have an unused cassette or other recording media for each interview. This makes it easier to organize later. Make sure that a spare cassette is on hand for those unexpected moments.
* Be absolutely sure about how long the device can record (e.g. 45 minutes, 60 minutes, 2 hours) and plan to have the appropriate number of cassettes.
* Check during the interview that the device is actively recording. With a video camera or digital audio recorder, this can usually be done by using headphones and ensuring that the recording light or symbol is displayed on the device.

###### Slide 6.

Choosing a location

There are a number of considerations when choosing a suitable location to conduct an interview. It should be free of distractions for the interviewer and, more importantly, for the respondent. While some respondents may be comfortable with an interview in a more public setting, others may feel more relaxed and willing to open up in their own homes. Often the best course of action is to ask the interviewees where they would feel most comfortable being interviewed.

Remember, when conducting an interview, too much background noise can be distracting and may ruin the quality of an audio recording. Often the naked ear filters out background noises that the recording device does not. Every small sound – a car passing, a lawnmower cutting, children laughing – is recorded.

###### Slide 7.

Setting up the interview

If an audio recording device is used, it should be positioned close to the interviewee. If a microphone is placed on a table, ensure that it is lifted off the table using a stand. Otherwise, the tabletop may reflect the sound resulting in an echo. Always ask permission from the interviewee before using any equipment.

When considering where the interviewee should sit in a room, pay attention to things around the room that might cause a distraction. For example, the interviewer should ask:

* Is there a door that may open during the interview?
* Is there an open window?
* Is there an audible television or radio playing?
* Are you close to a refrigerator, air conditioner or computer whose fans may impact the audio quality?

Many of these noises can be minimized by seating the interviewees with their backs to the quietest side of the room and with the microphone positioned in front of them, pointing towards the quiet area.

It is preferable that windows be closed and that computers, air conditioners and telephone ringers turned off during the interview. Remember that refrigerators and air conditioners turn on and off automatically and cause unnecessary noise – thisis a good argument for not conducting the interview in a kitchen. Use judgment as to whether or not it is advisable to pause the interview for a loud noise. It might be more important at that moment to let the person continue talking.

* The interviewer must always balance the sound quality of the interview with the general comfort and ease of the interviewee.
* Too much fussing can make a person feel nervous and inhibited when it is finally time to start talking.

###### Slide 8.

Asking questions

For an interview to be successful, the interviewee must feel comfortable, engaged and prepared to talk. To achieve this, it is critical that the interviewer asks clear, relevant and searching questions in an inquisitive manner and actively listens to responses, so that they are prepared to follow initial questions with further, probing ones. It may also be a good idea to begin with a question or topic that will put the interviewee at ease, such as basic biographic questions or other easy questions (e.g. region/village in country, place of residence, age, sex, and any additional questions depending on the element being discussed – religious affiliation, marital status, education level, etc.).

A good place to start when designing a successful interview is to consider what constitutes a good question and, perhaps more importantly, what is a bad question. The type of questions that are asked during an interview relate directly to the type of information under discussion. Therefore, a good question inspires a discussion that generates important and interesting information about the ICH element.

On the other hand, bad questions do exactly the opposite. A bad question:

* fails to provide insight about an ICH element;
* can upset the interviewees or make them feel awkward;
* disengages the interviewees so that they soon tire of the interview and take less care in responding to the questions; and
* can disrupt the flow of the conversation and leave the interviewees feeling confused.

###### Slide 9.

What, where, who, how, why and when

When structuring the overall flow of an interview and designing a set of questions, it is often helpful to think about what, where, who, how, when and why. These questions provide a formula for getting the full story on an ICH element and may elicit more complete responses than questions that begin with ‘do’ or ‘did’.

For example, if the ICH element of interest was harvesting Oolichan (a small fish used by indigenous people on the west coast of Canada), it would be helpful to first think about the topic (Oolichan harvesting) and the type of information that the interviewer is hoping to elicit. The goal is to ask questions that produce the most information about the topic. Some examples of types of questions that could be asked can be found below.

* What memories do you have of Oolichan harvesting?
* Where did you fish for Oolichan?
* With whom did you fish?
* What kind of equipment did you use to harvest Oolichan?
* How old were you when you harvested Oolichan?
* What beliefs accompany Oolichan?

###### Slide 10.

Open-ended vs. closed questions

There are two general types of questions used by interviewers: open-ended and closed.

An open-endedquestion cannot be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Open-ended questions are more conversational and can help an interviewee to open up and provide more information.

***Example:*** *‘What is your favourite childhood memory?’*

On the other hand, a closed question is a form of question that can be answered using a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, a specific simple piece of information or a selection from a set of predefined choices established by the interviewer.

***Example:*** *‘Do you like rice?’*

Keep in mind that open-ended or closed questions do not need to be used exclusively. Many interviewers use a combination of both. Closed questions can help warm up an interviewee at the start of an interview.

Open-ended questions encourage and support discussion. They often trigger morequestions for the interviewer because they encourage the interviewees to share and elaborate upon their perspectives – in other words, the interview becomes more of a conversation.

Some general tips include:

* Get the respondents engaged in the discussion as soon as possible. They should be conversing with the interviewer, rather than merely providing answers to questions.
* Use an open-ended question to encourage individuals to expand on a topic.
* Use a closed question to follow up on specific details.
* Ask questions about the present before asking questions about the past or the future; it is usually easier for respondents to talk about the present and then work into the past or future.

###### Slide 11.

Wording of questions

The way that an interviewer phrases a question is important, as it often shapes the way in which it is answered. Therefore, the questions should not reflect the interviewer’s personal opinions regarding an ICH element. Instead, they should seek to explore the knowledge of the interviewee.

The interviewer needs to develop questions that employ ‘neutral phrasing’. Neutral phrasing encourages the interviewees to answer freely, rather than encouraging them to provide an answer that they feel fits the interviewer’s views. When crafting questions, the interviewer should ensure the following:

* Question wording should be open-ended. Respondents should be able to choose their own terms and ways of expressing their ideas when answering questions.
* Questions should be perceived by the interviewees as being neutral. This means avoiding wording that might influence answers.
* Questions should be asked one at a time.
* Questions should be worded clearly. This involves presenting questions in such a way that respondents understand.
* ‘Why’ questions should be used with caution. This type of question can make a respondent feel defensive (i.e. that they may have to justify their answers) and thus may inhibit further responses.

If questions are not phrased neutrally, the line of questioning is referred to as ‘leading’. Leading questions often occur when an interviewer is trying (consciously or unconsciously) to obtain a specific answer (that often suits his or her own agenda), rather than allowing the interviewee to answer the question freely.

###### Slide 12.

Active listening

Active listening refers to the way in which the interviewer listens to and interacts with the interviewees. It encourages the development of a dialogue whereby the interviewees feel that their contribution is appreciated, interesting and respected. There are a number of ways that the interviewer can achieve this:

* Face the interviewees. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show attentiveness through body language.
* Maintain eye contact, to the degree that everyone remains comfortable.
* Respond appropriately to show that what is being said is understood.
* Focus solely on what the interviewees are saying. Try not to think about what to say next. The conversation follows a logical flow after the speakers makes their points.
* Keep an open mind. Wait until the interviewees finish talking before responding. Try not to make assumptions about what the interviewees are thinking. Ask for clarification if needed. Be prepared to take a detour from the list of prepared questions if the interviewee takes up a potentially interesting subject not on the list.
* Avoid expressing personal opinions or experiences, unless the interviewees specifically ask.
* Do not interrupt the interviewees in the middle of a sentence or thought; wait until they have finished. Otherwise, their train of thought may be broken.

By using an active listening approach, the interviewer hears the essence of the information as it is told. Often, interviewees may only hint at important subjects or issues; the interviewers are better able to pick up on these hints and explore them in greater depth if they are actively listening. They can therefore guide the interview much more effectively and respond with perceptive and relevant questions.

Being comfortable with long silences is crucial to the listening process. The timing of questions often requires the interviewers to sit through the silences of the interviewees' internal dialogue.

###### Slide 13.

Acknowledging answers

While it is important that interviewees know that the interviewer is actively listening during the course of the interview, many ‘uh-huhs’ can become distracting. Furthermore, if the interview is recorded using an audio recorder or video camera, those noises are heard on the final recordings.

Consequently, the interviewer’s responses, except for questions, should be timely and kept to a minimum. When the interviewer feels a need to respond, eye contact, head nodding or smiling are useful visual affirmations to indicate that he or she is listening to the information being shared.

Be sensitive to the needs of the interviewee. If she or he is getting tired, stop the interview and schedule another session. Between one and two hours is usually just about the right amount of time for an interview.

###### Slide 14.

Paraphrasing

If the interviewees need to be assured that they are being listened to and that their stories are understood, try to paraphrase an important part of the interview. Paraphrasing is restating a text or passage in the interviewer’s own words. This lets the interviewees know that the interviewer is connecting with them and is truly listening. However, as in the ‘acknowledging answers’ section above, it is important that any paraphrasing be done at a point in the interview when the interviewees have finished speaking so that the interviewer’s paraphrased words can be edited out and do not overlap with the interviewees’.

***Example:***

Interviewee: ‘When I was young, we would spend all summer in camps around the territory. Life was fun; we would play by the sea and pick berries in the forest. It was hard too… I remember we would have to haul fresh water every day, gut fish and always eat the same food! Happy memories.’

Interviewer’s paraphrase: ‘You had a wonderfully free life living so close to the land; it involved a lot of hard work too*.*’

###### Slide 15.

Concluding the interview

Before concluding the interview, it is a good idea to ask the interviewees if there is anything else they would like to discuss or add. Concluding in this way gives the interviewees the chance to ask questions, while potentially opening up a new line of discussion.

At the end of the interview, the interviewers may also wish to take a break and review their notes for any questions that may have gone unasked. The interviewers could also spend some time with the interviewees reviewing what will be done with the interview. The interviewees may also want to know a little bit about the interviewers. They may be interested in how the results will be used. Use these kinds of interests as a way to wrap up the conversation. It is important that the interviewees do not feel as if they have been rushed out upon completion of the interview.

Once the interview has finished, thank the interviewees. Even if the interview did not go well, it is important to politely thank the interviewees for their time and sharing their thoughts, knowledge and opinions.

The interviewer may also wish to make notes about the interview while it is still fresh: jot down impressions, observations, important themes, contextual information and ideas for follow up.

Source: Corbett J., Romano Z. and White K. 2010. *Handout for Trainee*. Unit M14U02, Module M14: Documentation; in “Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication”. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy.

Unit 25

Exercise 1: Planning the interview

#### Objective:

Establish an interview topic and develop an interview plan.

#### Time:

45 minutes

#### Materials:

A notepad and pen or pencil for each participant and flip charts.

#### Procedure:

* Form small groups.
* Instruct the participants to pick from one of the following four themes or use another theme that interests them:
* Family
* Career
* Travel
* Food.
* Invite participants to spend a few minutes thinking about what these topics mean to them and what kind of specific information they would like to learn. Tell them to consider how this information will be used – it is this use that will largely determine the kinds of questions they will want to ask. Since this is an exercise, the participants will need to roleplay when determining the use of interview material.
* Next, the participants should develop a set of questions to ask the interviewee. Remind them to include both open-ended and closed questions. Instruct them to ask at least one sequence of ‘who, what, where, when, how and why’ questions. The participants may find it useful to break the interview into several sub-themes. For example, for the theme of ‘family’, they may want to ask questions about parents, siblings and extended family. Some example questions for each theme are:

***Family***

* Where were you born?
* How many brothers or sisters do you have?
* What are some family traditions that you remember from childhood?

***Career***

* Have you taken any special training or courses?
* What does your current job entail?
* What career aspirations do you have for the future?

***Travel***

* Where is your favourite place to visit?
* Why do you like this place?
* Did you travel by yourself or with a group?

***Food***

* What is your favourite meal?
* How do you prepare this meal?
* Is this a traditional family recipe?
* Invite the participants to devise 10 questions and to record these in their notebook and on flip charts. In subsequent exercises, they will ask these questions in a roleplaying scenario. The participants should try not to ask questions that are overly personal in nature at this time.
* Participants present their questions for discussion to the whole group.

#### Tips and options:

* When conducting an interview, the participants should have a clear idea of the theme or topic around which their conversation will revolve.
* Avoid too much overlap with Unit 24 on Audio recording
* Rather than using one of the four suggested themes, the participants might choose an ICH element or an aspect they would like to pursue during the field practicum.

Source: Corbett J. and White K. 2010. *Exercise No. 1: Planning Your Interview*. Unit M14U02, Module M14: Documentation; in “Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication”. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy.

Unit 25

Exercise 2: Conducting the interview

#### Objective:

Conduct an interview.

#### Time:

45 minutes

#### Materials:

A notepad and pen or pencil, the interview plan developed in Exercise 1 and recording equipment (optional), such as an audio recorder.

#### Procedure:

* Divide participants into pairs.
* Assign someone the role of interviewer and someone the role of interviewee.
* Instruct the participants to begin the interview using the plan prepared in Exercise 1.
* Encourage the participants to experiment with asking open-ended and questions; tell them to note which ones produce the best responses.
* The participants should use open-ended questions when they would like the respondents to expand upon ideas.
* Instruct the participants to take note of which kinds of questions seemed to produce less helpful responses: Did the interviewee become disengaged? Did he or she seem uncomfortable or upset? Was the wording confusing?
* The participants should take note of any questions that may have been unintentionally leading (i.e. suggestive of a particular answer).
* When the participants are finished, instruct them to switch places and allow their partners to interview them.
* After 30 minutes, a few participants should report back to the group to discuss any challenges they encountered during the interview.

#### Tips and options:

* The interviewees should be given adequate time to respond to and elaborate upon ideas. They should feel free to improvise and add questions that may not appear on the original interview plan. Remember, the interview schedule is only a guide. Wherever possible, allow the conversation to flow naturally, while still staying on topic.
* This exercise might be combined with the next, especially if there are time constraints.

Source**:** Corbett J. and White K. 2010. *Exercise No. 3: Conducting the Interview*. Unit M14U02, Module M14: Documentation; in “Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication”. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy**.**

Unit 25

Exercise 3: Evaluating the interview

#### Objective:

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the interview processes and the different techniques and styles used, and discuss the overall experience of conducting an interview and the process of being interviewed.

#### Time:

45 minutes

#### Materials:

A notepad and pen or pencil and notes recorded in Exercise 2 ‘Conducting the interview’.

#### Procedure:

* Once both partners from paired groups have completed their interviews in Exercise 2, instruct the participants to take turns discussing the strengths of the interviews and areas for improvement.
* Instruct one member to explain what they liked and disliked about the interview and to identify which questions they liked more than others. Ask the member to try to articulate why this is the case (e.g. were any questions leading or negative?).
* Invite the participants to compare their comments with the notes they recorded in their notebooks. Let the interviewer explain how he or she felt about certain questions and compare the participants’ perspectives on this. Did they share the same concerns? Was their behaviour interpreted correctly?
* Tell the partners to make suggestions regarding what could be done differently in the future.
* Invite the participants to change places with their partners and repeat the interview.
* Once they have both had a chance to talk and all other pairs have finished, assemble as a group and invite participants to discuss the following:
* What kinds of questions were the most ‘successful’? Why?
* What kinds of questions did not produce thorough or accurate results? Why?
* Were participants able to meet the goals of the interview, that is, gain a greater understanding of the chosen topic?
* How did it feel to be interviewed?
* What feelings and/or tensions did the interviewer become aware of when conducting the interview (e.g. making the interviewees feel uncomfortable or asking leading questions)?

Source**:** Corbett J. and White K. 2010. *Exercise No. 4: Evaluating the Interview*. Unit M14U02, Module M14: Documentation; in “Training Kit on Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communication”. CTA, The Netherlands and IFAD, Italy.