



# The Art of Interviewing

Tuning in to audiences, visitors and donors

May 17, 2011, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

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## SEMINAR GOALS

- Learn how interviewing can be used in different situations to inform decision-making and elicit feedback
- Gain familiarity with interviewing methods and types of questions
- Build interviewing skills
- Leave with a few ideas about how you might apply what you've learned

## AGENDA

1:00	Welcome and Introductions
1:10	Demonstration interview and debriefing
1:40	Uses of interviewing
2:10	The mechanics of interviewing
2:40	Interviewing exercises <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Find someone you don't know</li><li>- Agree on one of the three exercises</li><li>- Conduct a short practice interview</li><li>- Switch roles and do it again</li></ul>
3:30	Report-outs
4:00	Wrap up

For additional information about impact assessment, see [www.intrinsicimpact.org](http://www.intrinsicimpact.org).

## Interview Protocol for Exercise #1: Donor Motivations

1. [Interviewer provides self-introduction]
2. **Can you recall a financial gift that you made to an arts organization (other than your own) in the past year? What organization was the recipient of your gift?**
3. Our conversation today is about the causes you support in general, and also about the specific gift you to [Name of Organization]. My objective is to understand as much as possible about your experience as a supporter of the arts and other causes. Are you ready to start?
4. **First, please tell me a little about your background and how long you've lived in the area. Where do you attend arts programs?**
5. Outside of work, what activities, hobbies or interests are you passionate about?
6. **How do you express yourself creatively?** What are your avenues of creative expression?
7. Think about all of your various activities, affiliations and causes that you support – all of the things that really define you as a person. Are there any convictions, beliefs, or principles that you have as a person that connect your various activities or that explain why you do what you do?
8. How broad or focused are your donations? **Can you give me some examples of different causes that you support financially?**
9. Can you give me an example of a contribution that you made over the past several years that you are especially proud of – a gift that was especially meaningful to you?
10. If you had \$10,000 to give to some nonprofit cause or project tomorrow, what would you choose to support? Why?
11. How much personal involvement do you like to have with the organizations you support? How do you like to be involved? Can you give me some examples?
12. How are you assured that your contributions are well used? **Do you trust arts groups to use your funds wisely, or do you like to have some proof or evidence that your contributions were well-spent?**
13. **What attracted you to give to [Name of Organization]?**
14. Would you make the same gift again? Why or why not?
15. **What would have made your experience as a donor even richer and more rewarding?**



## Interview Protocol for Exercise #2: Engagement

1. **[Interviewer provides self-introduction] [Pick an artistic discipline (music, dance, theatre, visual art) to be the focus of your conversation]**
2. Our conversation today is about the types of experiences you enjoy as a [theatre-goer/dance-goer/concert-goer/museum-goer]. My objective is to gain a more nuanced understanding of what motivates you to attend live performances [or exhibitions], and what types of educational or “enrichment” activities you enjoy. Are you ready to start?
3. **First, please tell me a little about your background and how long you’ve lived in the area. Where do you attend arts programs?**

First, I’d like to ask some questions about the totality of your experience attending [music/dance/theatre/visual art] programs.

4. How would you describe your taste in [music/dance/theatre/visual art]?
5. Do you tend towards work that you know and love, or work that is new and challenging?
6. When you go to a live [music/dance/theatre/visual art] event, what do you hope to get out of the experience? What makes it worthwhile? How do you know if you’ve had a successful evening?

**Next, I’d like to ask you about your preferences for different types of educational or “enrichment” activities surrounding [music/dance/theatre/visual art] programs.**

7. Some people like to prepare in advance for live arts programs by reading about the artist, or even attending a rehearsal or a lecture. Are you someone who likes to prepare, or are you too busy, or just not interested in preparing?
8. Are there any specific preparatory activities that you’ve done in the past – either at home, or at a theatre, or somewhere else – that you really enjoyed?
9. Arts groups these days think a lot about how to deepen the audience experience during performances by offering context and interpretive assistance in various forms. Examples include supertitles at the opera, or spoken introductions from the stage. In general, how do you feel about these sorts of activities?
10. Some people like to vigorously discuss the program immediately afterward, while others prefer to reflect quietly. How do you like to digest or “process” live performances you’ve seen?
11. Are there any specific post-performance engagement activities that you’ve done in the past – either at home, or at a theatre, or somewhere else – that you really enjoyed?

## Interview Protocol for Exercise #3: Program Impact

1. **[Interviewer provides self-introduction] [Agree to discuss a specific arts program that the interviewee has attended in the past month]**
2. Our conversation today is about your experience at [performance]. My objective is to learn as much as possible about the. Are you ready to start?
3. **First, please tell me a little about your background and how long you've lived in the area. Where do you attend arts programs?**

**Now, speaking about the specific program in question:**

4. Did you make a conscious decision to attend this program, or did you come out for a different reason? Help me by tracing your decision process as far back as possible.
5. **Specifically, what led you to attend this particular event?**

Now I'm going to ask you about some specific things that you may or may not have experienced during the program. Please be as candid as possible, and do not feel obligated to answer "Yes" to anything, just because I am asking you about it. OK?

6. **Were you fully absorbed in the performance, or did your mind wander?** How would you describe your level of focus on the performance, compared to other programs you've seen lately?
7. **Did the performance cause you to think about anything, or ask yourself any questions?** What did you think about?
8. Did you leave the [performance or exhibition] with questions that you would've liked to ask the [artist/performer/director/curator]? What were some of your questions?
9. **How strong or weak was your emotional reaction to the performance?** What emotions did you feel?
10. **Did the performance stretch you artistically in any way?** Were you exposed to anything new or different than what you'd seen in the past?
11. **Did you feel a sense of connectedness with the rest of the audience?** Can you describe it?
12. **When you look back on this performance a year from now, how much of an impression will be left?** What will you remember most?

# Post-Performance Impact Assessment Interviewing Guidelines

## Overview

Interviewing patrons and visitors about their arts experiences can be especially rewarding for staff members and board members of arts groups, as a means of staying in touch with audiences and visitors, understanding how the organization's work is received, and learning what motivates people to participate and what they want from the experience. Interviewing is a high-return, yet inexpensive form of market research that can be done by just about anyone. With a little preparation, interviews can yield insightful, nuanced information that can inform decision-making and provoke dialogue about core issues.

Of course, post-performance (or post-exhibition) “impact interviewing” is just one application of interviewing, and there are many others. Arts organizations may use interviewing techniques to:

- Test messages, images and marketing packages for the next season
- Assess the organization's competitive position in the marketplace in relation to other providers
- Consult with donors about their experience with the organization, and gain their feedback on programs
- Learn from external stakeholders what value the organization currently provides to the community, or might provide
- Get specific feedback on artistic work in development
- Gather input on proposed facility improvements, way-finding or amenities

These guidelines build on a ‘participatory interviewing’ technique developed by WolfBrown for arts groups in the U.S. as a means of building a more profound understanding of the motivations, values, and impacts of arts attendance. This document provides background information on interviewing, including suggestions for interview techniques, interviewee recruitment procedures, how to manage the physical set-up, and synthesizing what you learn.

For more information about impact assessment, see [www.intrinsicimpact.org](http://www.intrinsicimpact.org), where you may download an example of a post-performance interview protocol.



## Three Simple Steps to Prepare

Follow these simple instructions for conducting your interviews.

- **Read this briefing paper** to gain a sense of what will happen, and how you can contribute to the collective learning experience.
- **Review the interview protocol and conduct a practice interview [if time is available].** Review the interview protocol distributed with this briefing and conduct a practice interview on a friend or family member. Imagine that the tables were turned and you were being interviewed. How would you answer each question?
- **Recruit your interviewees**, following the instructions below.

## The Exercise

The purpose of the interviewing exercise is to gain an organic perspective on the range of impacts that audiences and visitors gain from attending your programs.

We suggest working in teams of two. Each team consists of an **Interviewer** and a **Recorder**. These roles are described in more detail below. Interviewers will conduct the interview, concentrating on guiding the conversation and probing the various questions. The Recorder's job is to capture (i.e., write down or type into a computer) the substance of the conversation and as much detail as possible so that it is not necessary to record the interview. To speed the learning process, Interviewers and Recorders should switch roles after each interview unless there is a strong preference to the contrary.

If possible, two teams of Interviewers and Recorders should conduct concurrent interviews following two performances during the run. This way, the two teams may compare notes immediately afterwards, and build a shared understanding of the process. The more interviews you are able to conduct, the richer your understanding of the show's impact will be.

Understanding audiences/visitors is not the sole responsibility of the marketing department, so we would encourage you to involve at least one member of your senior management team or board in the interviewing exercise.

You are free to conduct your interviews on your own schedule. Given the late hour, it may be difficult to keep audience members after evening performances. Because of this, you may want to start by recruiting interviewees for matinee performances.

## Five Simple Steps

Follow these simple instructions for conducting your interviews.

- **Settle on your team(s).** Interviewers and Recorders may be staff or board members from any department or program area. If possible, the team(s) should complete the whole exercise together, rather than switching out



people for each production. If necessary, the Interviewer may conduct one or more interviews alone without the aid of a Recorder. However, bear in mind that taking notes while interviewing can be difficult.

- **Schedule dates for the interviews.** As previously noted, you may want to start with interviewing after a matinee performance.
- **Recruit and confirm your interviewee(s).** Following the instructions for recruitment below.
- **Prepare an interview protocol and conduct a practice interview.** Review and adapt the interview protocol provided at [www.intrinsicimpact.org/content/free-downloads](http://www.intrinsicimpact.org/content/free-downloads) and conduct a practice interview on another staff member or a friend.
- **Conduct your interviews and debrief after each one.** The interview process is discussed in detail below. After each interview, spend 10 or 15 minutes with your partner discussing the main ideas from the interview that you wish to report.
- Periodically, report on your findings to artistic and other staff.

## Recruitment Instructions

Recruitment should be done by email in advance, or by intercepting people at the venue (e.g., before curtain, or at intermission). It is important to be clear that these interviews are for research purposes only and do not involve sales or fundraising. You may hand-pick the people you interview, so long as neither the Interviewer nor Recorder has a close personal relationship with them. Interviewees should not be affiliated with your organization as a staff member or volunteer. Generally, you want to recruit people who are ‘typical’ audience members, with a skew towards those who are more frequent attenders, since they will have more to say about your programs. You may interview individuals or couples. If you interview couples, it will be interesting to see how much their motivations and impacts differ. You may also choose to interview two or three couples (i.e., a mini-focus group), although you should never interview more than six people at once, to keep the conversation manageable.

More specifically:

- Send out a plain text email invitation to six to eight randomly selected ticket buyers, approximately 7 days in advance of the performance. This may be a bulk email – there is no need to individualize the email messages.
- The email should be sent directly from a staff person, not through an email server/program used for bulk email blasts.
- Create your recruitment message using the suggested language (see below).
- In general, we expect you will gain a favorable response from approximately 20% to 25% of those who receive your email.
- Wait for 24 hours to see who responds.



- You may receive more than one positive response. If so, randomly select one person to recruit, and reply to that person's email with a confirmation message (see below).
- You may choose to recruit two or three persons/parties, but do not accept more than six people total (i.e., three couples) into the discussion.
- Offer refreshments and an incentive (e.g., free tickets, cash or gift certificate).
- Follow up with positive responses immediately, providing further information (e.g., address of venue, instructions on where to meet after performance for the actual interview – by refreshment stand in the lobby, for example).
- If no one responds in 48 hours, send out more invitations until you have at least one positive response.
- Send a reminder message to your interviewees 24 to 28 hours prior to the performance.
- After the interview, send a thank you email to those who participated.

#### Suggested Language for Email Recruitment

Subject Line: *Special Request from [Name of Artistic/Executive/Managing Director] of [Organization Name].*

*Dear Friend,*

*I'm writing with an unusual request.*

*[Our Organization] seeks to learn more about how [audiences/visitors] feel about our work, and why they attend.*

*We are personally interviewing a small number of [ticket buyers] immediately after upcoming performances of [Name of Production].*

*Would you be willing to stay afterwards for a post-performance interview on [date of performance]? The conversation will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes.*

*If you plan to attend with another person, that individual is also welcome to participate in the interview.*

*As appreciation of your participation, we can offer you a [describe incentive here].*

*Please let me know if you can make it by RSVP'ing directly to this email by [date/time of response deadline], or by calling [phone number].*

*Sincerely,*

*[Name, Title]  
[Name of Organization]*

### Suggested Language for Confirmation Email

Subject Line: *Confirming Your Participation in a Post-Performance Interview*

Dear [Name],

*Thanks so much for your quick reply to the interview invitation. I am pleased to accept your generous offer to stay afterwards for an in-person interview:*

Name of Production: [Name of Production]

Date: [Date of Production, at Curtain Time]

*Please meet me in the lobby at [describe specific location for meeting spot], and I will take you to a nearby room for the interview. The discussion will last about 30 to 45 minutes, and will delve into your reactions to the production. In exchange for your participation, we will provide you with [describe incentive].*

*If another individual in your party will be participating in the interview with you, please reply to this email with that individual's name and relationship to you, so that we may anticipate his or her participation.*

*Thanks so much for your cooperation. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.  
Sincerely,*

[Name, Title]

[Name of Organization]

## **Background on Interviewing**

Over the past 15 years, we have found individual depth interviews to be one of the most valuable sources of information for arts administrators and board members of cultural organizations. Sitting down with ticket buyers, visitors and donors and asking them about their experiences sounds simple enough. In reality, few cultural institutions or funders conduct qualitative research on a methodical basis, and many have slipped out of touch with their constituents.

Conducting structured interviews is a highly disciplined type of research. The more forethought and preparation you bring to the interviews, the more you'll get out of them. This briefing paper discusses interviewing techniques and provides guidelines for conducting your interviews.

Interviewing is, by definition, a dynamic, unpredictable and participatory activity. The process of interviewing people yields valuable information that you would not get if someone else conducted the interviews and wrote a report for you. During most interviews, a great deal of data is communicated non-verbally, through body language, hesitation, gestures and intonation. No matter how good the researcher, it's just not the same as experiencing the interview in person. This is why the exercise is participatory.

Knowledge is power only if you absorb it, understand it and believe it. With the researcher out of the way, the "filter" between you and your interviewees is gone. Rather, your own experience and perspective becomes the filter through which you absorb data. You can decide whether or not to believe what you hear, but you've heard it with your own ears. Hence, the value of the research lays not so much in the outcome as in the process itself.

There are several different types of interviews, including oral histories, evaluation interviews and focus group interviews. You'll be using a *structured topical interview* as the primary means of gathering data. The overall topic of the interview is the audience member's feelings about the arts experience. The interview is structured because it is not an open conversation – by the end of the interview, you need to have answers to specific questions.

An interview, no matter how structured or unstructured, is really just a conversation between two unique individuals. The outcome of the interview is influenced by both of your personalities. The setting of the interview is also important. With a little practice, anyone with good conversation skills can become a good interviewer.

Good interviewing also requires a good set of questions. Asking the wrong questions (or avoiding the hard questions) is a waste of time. You may feel good by the end of the interview, but nothing is gained. Asking the right questions the right way, however, can unleash passionate, emotional or even angry responses – which can be extremely informative.

The subject matter of these interviews is personal, and the exchange may get intimate and emotional. For a productive interview, you'll need to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.

Which brings us to the hardest part of interviewing – listening. A good interviewer is a good listener. Listening requires a great deal of concentration. A good listener understands what the respondent is saying, and also thinks about what the respondent is *not saying*, or *trying to say*. Good listening is *bearing between the lines*, and gently coaxing the respondent to elaborate on a point (i.e., probing) until you have a satisfactory response. A good listener hears when the respondent is having difficulty answering a question, and re-phrases the question or illustrates a response drawing from her own experience. "Maybe I can help you with this question by telling you how I would answer it for myself..." Perhaps the most difficult aspect of interviewing is simultaneously concentrating on what the interviewee is saying and also having a sense of where the interview is going – whether to probe deeper or move on to the next question.

Of course, many people aren't able to articulate their motivations, values and deep feelings about something like an arts experience. But this doesn't mean that they don't experience profound benefits. Unfortunately, we can't hypnotize people and get an open connection to the subconscious, although there are more involved research techniques using symbolism and metaphors that effectively elicit people's subconscious thoughts.

The most difficult thing that this exercise will require of you is to infer some of the deeper meanings, values and impact associated with arts attendance from what your interviewees tell you (and don't tell you) in a 30-minute interview.

## **The Interview Setting**

A comfortable, intimate setting can contribute a great deal to a productive interview. Use your own judgment in deciding where to interview people, but avoid conference rooms with big tables. The Interviewer should sit directly opposite the respondent, without a table in between, if possible. The general idea is a direct visual connection, so that you can observe body language. If you meet around a table, the Interviewer should sit just around the corner of the table from the respondent, but not too close.

The Recorder may sit anywhere else in the room, preferably with a clear view of the respondent. Remember that during the interview, the Recorder is a silent observer and not a discussion participant. As the interview progresses, the respondent should forget that there is anyone else in the room. At the end of the interview, however, the Interviewer may ask the Recorder if he or she has any further questions or clarification points.

## **Role of the Interviewer**

The Interviewer is the person who leads the discussion and assumes primary responsibility for the outcome. The Interviewer should be familiar with the protocol in advance of the interviews and, if possible, should conduct a practice interview.

The interview protocol is a road map for your conversation with the respondent. But there are many pathways to a successful, productive interview. Ultimately, each interview will have a unique flow. The protocol should be used as a *guide to your conversation*. The final authority on how you manage the conversation belongs to the Interviewer.

After posing a question, allow the respondent time to formulate a response. If the respondent has difficulty with a question, the Interviewer may re-phrase the question or provide an example of a response, drawing from his or her own experience. This can spark some ideas in the respondent's mind. Use this technique lightly, however, as you don't want to lead the respondent too far. The Interviewer will also "probe" on the respondent's answers, asking follow-up questions, some of which are in the protocol, but some of which may be asked spontaneously, such as, "*Why do you feel that way?*" or "*Can you give me another example?*"

Don't be afraid to manage the conversation proactively, if you can do so without offending the respondent. As you get into the protocol, try to do a minimum of talking, and avoid offering your own personal opinions on a subject.

Invariably, the respondent will digress or deviate from the protocol. This can be one of the more challenging aspects of interviewing – deciding whether to tolerate the digression in order to get useful data, or whether to bring the conversation back to the protocol: "*I'd like you to hold that thought for a few minutes and we'll come back to it*" or "*I'd love to hear more about that, but in the interest of time, I really must bring the conversation back to the list of questions we've prepared for you.*"

It's not unusual for a respondent to preemptively answer a question that comes later in the protocol. Use your own discretion as to whether or not to allow this sort of jumping around within the protocol, bearing in mind that it can drive Recorder mad. Generally, I encourage you to stick to the design as closely as possible without offending the respondent.

## **Role of the Recorder**

The Recorder's job is to capture the conversation in as much detail as possible, including some verbatim quotes. Notes may be taken by hand or typed into a computer, whichever the Recorder prefers. Some hints on note taking:

- Use the letter "R" to refer to the respondent
- If the respondent says something emphatically or repeatedly, underline the comment or idea in your notes, to suggest emphasis
- Circle comments or ideas that YOU think are important
- If you're typing notes into a computer, don't worry about spelling mistakes; getting the ideas down is more important

During the interview, capture any particularly interesting or representative comments that the respondent offers. You'll have to write (or type) fast. Use quotation marks to delineate verbatim comments such as:

"They made me feel like my gift was the lynchpin of the whole project."

You should also write down some of your own observations as you go, such as:

"R. is uncomfortable with this question."

"R. experiences art through her children, but not independently."

"R is frustrated for lack of a creative outlet."

These observations will help you remember some of the key themes of the interview when you have the debriefing session afterwards. The role of the Recorder is essential. Without an audiotape, the Recorder's notes represent the best record of what transpired during the interview.

## **After the Interviews**

Allow yourself 10 to 15 minutes of time afterwards for the purpose of debriefing with your partner. Use this time to talk through the interview and identify the few most salient aspects of the conversation. Move question by question through the protocol and briefly discuss your impressions of the interviewee's answers and distill some key observations. What surprised you? How did this interview compare with others? *This debriefing is an essential component of the process. Without it, you're likely to lose a great deal of the data.*

After your last interview, plan a meeting to distill what you learned across all of the interviews you conducted. Were the answers consistent or inconsistent? How do motivations and impacts vary across your interviewees? Be prepared to summarize your interviews for other staff and consultants on check-in calls.

