

FIELD OPERATIONS

All fieldwork involves the selection, training, and supervision of persons who collect data for the marketing research projects. Many research projects depend upon the support of this field force to a greater degree. Eventually the quality of the research outputs completely depends upon the field workers. The validation of fieldwork and the evaluation of field workers are also parts of the process.

Selection and Training of Interviewers

Researcher has to choose qualified persons as interviewers and train them.

Selection - The first step in the fieldwork process is the selection of field workers. The researcher should:

- Develop job specifications for the project, taking into account the mode of data collection;
- Decide what characteristics the field workers should have; and
- Recruit appropriate individuals. Interviewers' background characteristics, opinions, perceptions, expectations, and attitudes can affect the responses they elicit.

Training - The training of field workers is critical to the quality of data collected. Training may be conducted in person at a central location or, if the interviewers are geographically dispersed, by mail, video-conferencing, or by using the Internet. Training ensures that all interviewers administer the questionnaire in the same manner so that the data can be collected uniformly.

- **Making the initial contact** - This can bring about the successful cooperation of the respondent, who must be convinced that his/her participation is important and that the survey has a legitimate goal. If the respondents feel other way about the research, then the whole results will be highly questionable.
- **Asking questions** - Any slight change in the exact wording of a question can distort the meaning intended by the researcher and the uniformity of responses across the sample. The field force should be briefed about the importance of asking the questions exactly as in the questionnaires.
- **Probing** - The process of probing motivates respondents to enlarge on or clarify a previous answer in order to extract all information, which is pertinent to the interview. Only by the conscious effort and high degree of involvement, the field force can learn this.

➤ **Recording answers** - Precision in recording answers to both structured and unstructured responses is critical to interpreting consumer responses accurately. The researcher should conduct if required, mock interview process of training the field force.

➤ **Terminating the interview** - The respondent should be left with positive feelings about the interview and the research company should have all the information needed when the interview is terminated. This is very crucial, if you are using snow ball sampling techniques.

Supervision - Supervision of field workers means making sure that they are following the procedures and techniques in which they were trained; thus, resulting in accurately completed surveys that will lead to meaningful analysis. Supervision involves quality control and editing, sampling control, control of cheating, and central office control.

Validation of Fieldwork

Validation of fieldwork means verifying that the field workers are submitting authentic interviews. To validate the study, the supervisors call 10 to 25 percent of the respondents to inquire whether the field workers actually conducted the interviews. The supervisors ask about the length and quality of the interview, reaction to the interviewer, and basic demographic data. The demographic information is cross-checked against the information reported by the interviewers on the questionnaires.

Evaluation of Field Force

Field workers must be evaluated so that workers who meet objectives are identified. This will result in a better field force and opportunity to train the poorer workers so that their performance will be improved. Workers should be evaluated in terms of time, response rates, quality of interviewing, and quality of data.

- Cost and Time
- Total cost per completed interview
- Total time per completed interview
- Response Rate
- Percentage of completed interviews over contacts
- Quality of interviewing
- The appropriateness of the introduction
- The precision in asking questions

- Ability to probe without bias
- Ability to ask sensitive questions
- Interpersonal skills
- Manner of terminating the interview
- Quality of data
- Recorded legibly
- Followed instructions
- Verbatim recording of unstructured question responses
- Meaningful recording of unstructured question responses
- Low incidence of item non-response

Guidelines for the Interviewers

Most fieldwork suffers from either interviewer error or nonresponse error. Interviewer errors consist of respondent selection errors, questioning errors, recording errors, and cheating errors. The non-response errors are due to refusals and not-at-homes. During the interview, the interviewers may consider the following guidelines to conduct the process more efficiently and effectively.

- Be thoroughly familiar with the questionnaire; this will create very high trust from the respondents
- Ask the questions in the printed order; do not skip any questions, which will create doubts in the respondents' mind
- Use the exact wording as printed on the questionnaire;
- Read each question slowly according to the respondents requirements
- Repeat questions that are not understood; this will create high quality responses
- Follow instructions related to asking questions carefully
- Ask all questions except those which should be skipped