

Conducting Interviews in Consultancies

In church consultancy, we use interviews as one of the primary tools to gather in-depth information from key people. It is easy to assume one knows how to interview well and sometimes inadequate time and preparation can be given to this aspect of information gathering. Below are some aspects to consider as you prepare for interviews.

Who do you interview?

1. Interviews are time consuming compared to other methods of data gathering so be careful who you select to interview. Often, 3 – 7 interviews can be adequate.
2. Interviews give privileged access to the consultants, so it is also important to have a clear justification for the selection of those interviewed, especially if there are contentious issues.
 - a. E.g. We will interview the elders or elders and spouses. We will interview the senior staff team. We will interview the pastor and his/her partner, and four people nominated by the leadership team as representing various groups within the church.
3. Permission may be sought from the leadership group to interview people who have had past association with the church or who are external to the congregation. These may include former staff, former members, former leaders and pastors, and also denominational leaders, previous consultants and specialists. Interviews with these should not be conducted without explicit permission from the leadership group.
4. Be cautious about conducting informal interviews with people who want to get their viewpoint across. Welcome submissions from people with concerns as long as they have participated in the process at another point. E.g., a comment group, congregational meeting.

Timing

1. Generally, a 30 min to 45 min interview is a good timeframe to aim for.
2. A longer interview should be given to the pastor and if appropriate, her / his spouse. This could be divided into sections – e.g., 1 hour for the pastor, 0.5 hours together, 0.5 hours for the spouse (if appropriate).

Content

1. Prepare an outline of the interview based on the objectives. Each interview must be consistent with others, i.e. the same questions need to be asked in the same way.
2. Always include the “anything else question: *“Is there any significant question we should have asked you but didn’t?”* or *“Is there anything else significant we should know about?”*
3. Allow a little time for questions from the interviewee about the consultancy process.

Environment

1. Conduct the interviews in a neutral environment, not the person’s office. This is important especially when interviewing those in authority (e.g. pastor).
2. It is important that the consultants steer the interview, not the person being interviewed.
3. Where appropriate, it is common (and often a best practice) to allow the session to be more informal