

Interviews

Interviews (whether structured, semi-structured, or completely 'open') are very common in project evaluations. They provide an opportunity to get a large amount of detail about a particular aspect of project delivery, whether from a participant, music practitioner, project manager, parent/carer, member of the community, or anyone else linked to the project.

One common description of an evaluation interview is a 'conversation with a purpose'. In that sense it is useful to have a clear idea of what information you are trying to access before the interview starts. Interviews can be especially useful if used to shed light on the meaning of something that has been observed using another indicator or source of evidence. For this reason it's important to use 'open' questions in interviews (i.e. not questions that are designed to be answered with a yes or no). It's also important that you don't ask leading questions (e.g. 'how much do you love taking part in 'Making Sounds'?').

For example, you have seen that the overall score of musical ability in your group (using the 'Youth Music Musical Ability questionnaire') at the start of the project is 2, but you expected it to be much higher. By using some of the same questions from the questionnaire in an interview situation with a single young person, you are told that, when considering themselves against other musicians in the group, they have actually scored themselves lower than they otherwise would have. By combining methods in this way you have a much clearer indication of how musical ability is changing within the group.

With structured or semi-structured interviews it is useful to use a topic guide (i.e. a list of questions that you want answered) to keep you on track. These don't have to be answered in the same format by everyone you want to interview, but should relate directly to the outcome(s) you are measuring. It is also important to consider where and when you would like to conduct an interview and make sure that you are putting the needs of your interview participant first (they should also be made to feel comfortable throughout).

It is also important to ensure confidentiality to interviewees. If you wish them to be open and honest with you and discuss how they have been feeling about certain aspects of their development, it is important that you honour their trust. You should reassure interviewees that anything they say will not be traced back to them and that you will anonymise their words. It is also important that participants have explicitly consented for their interview to be used in the evaluation.

It is useful to tape record interviews and to take notes throughout to keep you on track if there are any comments or questions that you want to come back to. These can also be used to store the material until you come to analyse and report on it. Tapes, notes and transcripts should also be handled with care to ensure confidentiality throughout.



Box 1. Example Interview Topic Guide – Making Sounds

Semi-structured interview with Meg (participant - week 1)

- Q1. How do you feel about your current level of musical ability?
- Q2. What are the areas of your musical ability that you would most like to improve on?
- Q3. Who are the people that are most important for you learning music?
- Q4. What are the things that are most important for you to practice your music? Q5. What feelings do you get most from playing music?

Box 2. Reporting Example for Making Sounds – Semi-structured interview

In order to understand how musical ability was developing across the project we interviewed three participants at the beginning and at the end of their involvement (an example topic guide can be seen in attachment 1). When asked how they felt about their current level of musical ability at the beginning of the project, participants were clear that their experiences of music making had been limited to what they did at school. None of the participants were particularly sure of their own musical ability but did show an eagerness to commit to improving musically, due mostly to their interest in listening to music.

For example, Meg (not her real name) suggested:

Since I left school I haven't done anything musical, but I do really like watching the music channels when I can, and it's always on in the background. I do like it, that's why I always think 'it'd be really cool if I could record my own track one day' or whatever.

