

Conducting Interviews in Consultations

1. 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 is given to this aspect of information gathering. Prepare an Interview running sheet with the key questions, a guide to time and space for taking careful notes.
2. Interviews are time consuming compared to other methods of data gathering so be careful who you select to interview. 3 – 7 interviews of ½ hour to 45mins in addition to the pastor is usually adequate.
3. A longer time (up to 1.5 -2.0 hours) should be given to the pastor and her/his spouse. This time can be divided into sections for example. 1 hour for the pastor alone, ½ hour together as a couple, ½ alone for the pastor's spouse (if appropriate).
4. 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. 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.
5. Those who have been interviewed do not attend comment groups. It is important therefore to cover the same basic questions and issues that will be covered in the comment groups.
6. Prepare an outline for the interview based on the objectives. It is usual to use a slightly extended form of the outline prepared for comment groups and also to allow the session to be more informal. Each interview must however be consistent with others i.e. the same questions need to be asked in the same way.
7. Conduct the interviews in a neutral environment, not the person's office. This is important especially when interviewing the pastor or staff. It is important that the consultants steer the interview not the person being interviewed.
8. Allow a little time for questions about the consultancy process.
9. Always include the *left-field* question:
"Is there any significant question we should have asked you today but didn't?..."
10. In the process section of the report it is important to mention how many interviews were conducted. On occasions it may be important to document the names of those interviewed in the report although this is usually left out.
11. 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 former pastors and also denominational leaders, previous consultants and specialists. Interviews with these should not be conducted without explicit permission from the leadership group.
12. *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.*