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## STRATEGIES FOR CONDUCTING DOORSTEP INTERVIEWS AFTER A DISASTER

*Alexa Tanner*, University of British Columbia

*Ryan P. Reynolds*, University of British Columbia

Disasters may lead researchers to travel to affected areas to gather time-sensitive data, such as by interviewing residents at their homes regarding their event experiences and recovery. Given the perishable nature of such data, timely travel to the site is essential. This check sheet is intended to assist researchers in preparing and conducting doorstep interviews after a hazard or disaster has occurred.

### Pre-Departure Preparations

- Safety** - Safety is always the number one priority. Coordinate with local emergency coordinators, police services, or locally-based researchers in advance to let them know you will be in the area conducting academic research with approval from your institution's research ethics board. All team members should have local contact information for one another, including cell phone numbers, as well as details for local health care facilities. Consider sharing research team members' locations with one another using tracking devices or services provided via mobile devices. Have a daily scheduled check-in with someone outside the region (e.g., family, university contact), and have a plan in place in case they do not hear from you after a set number of hours.
- Self-Sufficiency** - Plan to be self-sufficient with your own food, water, medication, and internet/cellular connections.
  - For more information on this topic, see the [Don't Forget – A Checklist of Supplies to Bring to The Field](#) check sheet in this series.
- Exit Strategies** - Plan, before departure, what to do if the local conditions become too dangerous to continue your research.
- Sampling Strategy** - Decide which communities and households you would like to talk to. Determine your sampling strategy and be specific about which residences you will be visiting. Assign each member of your team their specific tasks ahead of time.
  - For more information on this topic, see the [Approaches to Sampling](#) check sheet in this series.
- Canvassing Route** - Be strategic with your canvassing route and timing - place research teams within a short distance of one another; plan to visit high priority communities over different days and at different times of the day; remain in central locations if the full team is unavailable or needs to split up; be respectful of cultural norms and avoid times of religious observances or meals. Have a method to identify and share with other team members which houses were approached and the outcome (e.g., interview conducted, pamphlet left, uninterested, unsafe).
- Recording** - Decide how survey or interview responses will be recorded (e.g., tablets, audio recording devices, paper and pen, etc.). Plan to purchase necessary field supplies ahead of time and have a strategy to keep research materials dry and safe. Decide if post-event damage to buildings and road access will be documented and how (e.g., written, video recorded, photographed).

## Conducting Doorstep Interviews

- Cultural Competence** - Be aware of cultural norms and the preferred language of the participant. Always be compassionate and use active listening. Residents may have recently experienced a traumatic event, and you may be the first person with any sort of expertise coming to talk to them about it.
  - For more information on this topic, see the following CONVERGE Check Sheets: [Best Practices for Ethical Post-Disaster Community Outreach and Engagement](#); [Tips for Empathy, Understanding, and Ethical Research Engagement](#); and [Questions to Encourage Culturally Competent Research](#).
  - The CONVERGE Training Modules on [Cultural Competence](#) and [Disaster Mental Health](#) also provide more detailed information.
- Identify Yourself** - It is a good practice to wear a nametag or a logoed shirt with your formal affiliation so that your credentials are readily apparent. Also consider getting a magnetic sign to place on your car door, to help people to see your formal affiliation via the vehicle you are driving.
- Approach** - As you approach each house, have reference material about the project available in the local language(s). Be prepared with a very short introduction about who you are, what your research is about, and what you are asking from participants. This initial approach has a significant impact on how many households agree to participate, so trialing a few introductions and sharing what works with the research team early in your fieldwork may help increase your response rate. If the resident is hesitant to open the door it is okay to ‘talk through the door’ to identify yourself as a part of a research project and build initial rapport. If no one answers, it is a good idea to leave behind materials that let potential participants know when you plan to return, as they may open the door the next time, when they know you are from a legitimate research team.
- Safety** - If a house looks physically unsafe, such as those with “beware of dog” signs and a barking dog outside, skip it. Try not to go inside someone’s house. If needed (e.g., the participant can’t stand for the duration of the interview) suggest sitting and completing the interview outside. If you conduct the interview inside, avoid straying far from the door. Always have an exit plan. If mobile devices are low on battery, head to your base.
- Vehicle** - If possible, keep a vehicle nearby to act as a portable ‘base of operations’ that can be used to quickly leave the area, provide a warm and dry place to rest, charge devices, store extra materials, etc. Be aware of local parking rules and the vehicle’s safety.
- Interview Guide** - During the interview, follow your research team’s interview guide, though do so with compassion to the participant. End the interview or skip questions if they seem to be emotionally charged and remind the participant that they have the ability to ask to pause or stop the interview themselves.
  - For more information on the topic of conducting emotionally challenging research, see the CONVERGE Training Module [Conducting Emotionally Challenging Research](#).
- Ending** - As the interview concludes (or if the individual declines), thank the participant and offer suggestions or handouts for preparedness and recovery activities so the individual can learn more and take immediate action.
- Alternative Methods** - If the participant is unable to participate at the time of your visit, consider offering other methods of participation, such as a follow-up visit, an online survey, or a telephone or video call.
- Observations** - At the end of the interview, once you have left the participant’s home, record observations of the participant, the building conditions (related to research objectives), and the outcome (e.g., whether an interview was conducted, or pamphlet left).

This check sheet is designed to be used in conjunction with local health authority restrictions and your organization’s or university’s research guidelines. Depending on local conditions, this may include a requirement to wear medical masks, a mandatory quarantine period prior to entering communities, and specialized research protocols related to the research of human subjects.

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