
THE VALUE OF FIELDWORK BRIEFINGS

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Fieldwork is an adaptive process that requires adjusting to the conditions encountered on the ground; even the most comprehensive field research plans can face unexpected dilemmas and require the need for dynamic revision. As fieldwork is unfolding, important research lessons should be shared with your research team. This check sheet provides guidance on the importance of such fieldwork briefings and best practices for how they can be used to improve the research process.

Pre-Departure Briefings

- Pre-departure briefings are useful to ensure the ethics and rigor of the study design and to bring the research team up to date with the latest research plan and logistics. These briefings may include a discussion on:
 - Research design including sampling approach and methods
 - Ethical considerations
 - Travel dates
 - Transportation methods
 - Accommodations
 - Meeting times and location
 - Technology requirements and limitations
 - University or local requirements for field research
 - Comfort and safety
 - Local medical facilities
 - Individual accommodations or needs
 - Safety procedures and strategies

In-Field Briefings

- In-field briefings may be held as frequently as once or twice daily, or on an as-needed basis. The need for briefings may become less frequent as your procedures and routines are refined through practice. Meetings may be formal or informal, such as over breakfast and dinner, and may include questions such as:
 - What is and is not working?
 - Do specific questions need to be added, revised, or removed from interview protocols or discussion guides?
 - What could be changed to improve data collection?
 - Are there ethical or cultural concerns arising? How might the research strategy need to be modified to address these concerns?
 - What logistical concerns do researchers have? For example, safety, access to food, washrooms, accessibility needs.

- How are participants interpreting the research project and interview questions? Is anything unclear or troubling that needs to be addressed?
 - While it is best practice to stick to the approved interview script when in the field, if something is not working, in-field briefings are a great place to talk as a group to see if others are experiencing the same problem and strategize how to overcome it. Some examples might include how to transition from one topic to the next, reordering questions for a better flow, or how to prompt participants on difficult questions.
- What impressions do the researchers have on the topic and on interacting with participants?
 - Did any interesting comments come up?
 - What insights have been discovered in your conversations with participants?
- How is the event that brought you to the community unfolding within the media, local political discussions, and community groups?

As the questions above suggest, fieldwork is a dynamic and iterative process. When things are going well, these processes and practices should be amplified. If something is not working, try to be flexible and adapt to the changing conditions. Any significant changes to study design or research instruments should be approved by the organization's or university's Institutional Review Board. Any observations and changes in perspective over the course of fieldwork should be recorded; these will help you interpret and write up the final results, when the time comes.

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