COMMUNITY MAPPING: Collecting Data for Your Map - How to Interview

ASK

How can you conduct a good interview and use the information to enhance your map?

In this section, you will learn how to confidently conduct an interview.

INVESTIGATE

A way to gather interesting data to enhance your map is to interview people who represent areas or have knowledge about sites you want to highlight on your map. For example, if your map highlights local parks, you may interview the park ranger or someone who helped establish the community playground as a memorial.

An interview is a conversation that is directed by questions to seek specific information. If you are not experienced at conducting interviews, don’t worry. You will feel better about doing an interview with some preparation and practice.

First, you will want to decide what information you would like to gather to enhance your map. Then think of people or do research to find out who might be able to provide the information you need. Next you will need to contact the person(s) and make arrangements for an interview. Interviews can be conducted in person or by phone (texting or email may not be the best methods).

CREATE

After you have determined what information you would like to highlight on your map, proceed through the following steps.

1. Make a list or of whom you would like to interview. You may need to do some research to find out who may have the information you require.

   TIP: If you are seeking information about a business, some business owners may not be as fully informed of the day to day operations as the manager who is at the business everyday.

2. Think of questions you would like to ask in order to get the information you need. Prepare your list of questions. Practice saying the questions out loud because when you conduct the interview, the rhythm of the questions will be natural and it will not sound as if you are simply reading them. Keep in mind that during the interview, you may need to ask probing questions to clarify the information you are gathering.

3. Contact the person(s) you would like to interview. Explain who you are, why you would like to interview him/her, and how their expertise can help. Communicate how much time the interview will take and if they agree to meet with you, schedule a time for the interview.

4. Practice using the tape recorder, voice recorder, video recorder, or other instrument you plan to use during the interview. This may sound simple but it is essential to your success. Determine how far away (or how close) the recorder or microphone should be for best sound quality. Be sure to have back up equipment such as batteries and extra tapes just in case! Have everything ready to record before the interview.

5. Plan to take good notes. Even though you are taping the interview, don’t rely completely on the recording for all your information – anything can happen! Consider the tape recording as an added bonus, not the sole means of gathering or storing the information.
6. Make a good impression. Be on time and dress neatly.

7. When you arrive for the interview—Relax. Take a few deep breaths. By being prepared, you will reduce your own anxiety.

8. Conduct the Interview.
   a. Introduce yourself to the person you are interviewing. Make eye contact and offer a firm handshake.
   b. Explain your project and the purpose of the interview.
      i. Sit straight up with your shoulders back comfortably and your head up so you can maintain eye contact.
      ii. Make eye contact as much as possible. It shows you are interested in what the person is saying.
      iii. Avoid crossing your arms in front of yourself or holding your papers against yourself—this appears as if you are closed off to the person you are talking to.
      iv. Smile. It will make you feel more relaxed and set the other person at ease.
   d. Be aware of your voice level. When people get nervous, the pitch of their voice tends to rise and may get softer or louder. Pay attention to what your voice is doing and adjust accordingly.
   e. Use appropriate language. Be careful not to use slang terms. Keep your conversation comfortable yet professional.
   f. Ask for permission to record the interview. Occasionally check the recorder throughout the interview to make sure it is working properly.
   g. Ask your questions one at a time and allow enough time for the answer. Remember to prepare the questions in advance and practice saying them out loud.
   h. Listen carefully. Ask clarifying questions if you do not understand what the person is saying (these questions are not prepared in advance).
   i. Take good notes.
   j. Stay on track. Try not to let the conversation stray from the information you need.
   k. Be respectful of the time. Stay within the time limit you prearranged.
   l. Thank the person you interviewed.

9. After the interview. Review the information you gathered and prepare it for adding to your map. (See “Linking Data to Your Map”).
   a. Keep the report short and simple. Include a strong lead sentence that summarizes the point.

DISCUSS

• What did you enjoy most about conducting the interview?
• What did you learn about interviewing?

REFLECT

• How will this activity help you in the future?
• How have you used the information from the interview to enhance your map?