

# Interview

There's no better way to understand the hopes, desires, and aspirations of those you're designing for than by talking with them directly.

Interviews really are the crux of the Inspiration phase. Human-centered design is about getting to the people you're designing for and hearing from them in their own words. Interviews can be a bit daunting, but by following these steps below you'll unlock all kinds of insights and understanding that you'll never get sitting behind your desk. Whenever possible, conduct your Interviews in the person's space. You can learn so much about a person's mindset, behavior, and lifestyle by talking with them where they live or work.

## STEPS

### TIME

60-90 minutes

### DIFFICULTY

Moderate

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Pens, paper, Interview Guide worksheet p. 166

### PARTICIPANTS

Design team, person you're designing for

- 01** | No more than three research team members should attend any single Interview so as to not overwhelm the participant or crowd the location. Each team member should have a clear role (i.e. interviewer, note-taker, photographer).
- 02** | Come prepared with a set of questions you'd like to ask. Start by asking broad questions about the person's life, values, and habits, before asking more specific questions that relate directly to your challenge.
- 03** | Make sure to write down exactly what the person says, not what you think they might mean. This process is premised on hearing exactly what people are saying. If you're relying on a translator, make sure he or she understands that you want direct quotes, not the gist of what the person says.
- 04** | What you hear is only one data point. Be sure to observe the person's body language and surroundings and see what you can learn from the context in which you're talking. Take pictures, provided you get permission first.

## METHOD IN ACTION



### Interview

One of the pillars of human-centered design is talking directly to the communities that you're looking to serve. And there's no better way to understand a person's desires, fears, and opinions on a given subject than by interviewing them.

In 2012, IDEO.org worked with the World Bank's Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) and the bank Bancomer to identify opportunities for new and more accessible savings products to serve low-income Mexicans. The team conducted a ton of Interviews over the course of the project, each time trying to understand how people save their money. Again and again the team heard, "I don't save money." But after asking a few more questions they came to learn that low-income Mexicans may not think of their informal methods as savings in the way that a bank might, but they are certainly socking money away. And understanding how they do it was critical to the team's ultimate design.

Thanks to their Interviews, the team learned that one man stashed extra money in the pockets of his shirts when he hung them in the closet. Another woman gave money to her grandmother because she knew that she wouldn't let her spend it on something frivolous. Still another woman parcelled her money out in coffee cans dedicated to various expenses like school fees, food, and rent.

The team even talked to one man who saved his money in bricks. He was "saving" to build a house so he put his extra money in building supplies and then, after a few years, constructed the house.

A key insight that came out of these interviews was that many low-income Mexicans don't save for saving's sake, they save for particular things. This idea led directly to the team designing a project-based approach to savings, aptly dubbed "Mis Proyectos" (My Projects).

Try to conduct your Interviews in the homes or offices of the people you're designing for. Put them at ease first by asking more general questions before getting specific. And be sure to ask open-ended questions instead of yes-or-no questions.

# Interview Guide

## Open General

What are some broad questions you can ask to open the conversation and warm people up?

What kind of job do you have?  
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How are you paid?  
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How do you save for the future?  
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## Then Go Deep

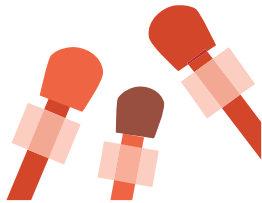
What are some questions that can help you start to understand this person’s hopes, fears, and ambitions?

How do you allocate your money now?  
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Where do you actually keep the money you want to  
put aside?  
.....

What helps you save money?  
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If you've visited a bank, tell us about your experience.  
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## Group Interview

You can come to a quick understanding of a community's life, dynamics, and needs by conducting a Group Interview.

Though a Group Interview may not offer the depth of an individual Interview (p. 39) in someone's home, it can give you a compelling look at how a larger set of the people you're designing for operates. The best Group Interviews seek to hear everyone's voice, get diverse opinions, and are strategic about group makeup. For example, an all-female group might give you insight into the role of women in a society whereas a mixed group may not. If you're looking to learn quickly what is valuable to a community, Group Interviews are a great place to start.

### STEPS

**TIME**

90-120 minutes

**DIFFICULTY**

Moderate

**WHAT YOU'LL NEED**

Pens, paper, camera

**PARTICIPANTS**

At least 2 members of the design team,  
7-10 people you're designing for

- 01** | Identify the sort of group you want to talk with. If you're trying to learn something specific, organize the group so that they're likely to have good answers to the questions that you've got.
- 02** | Convene the Group Interview on neutral ground, perhaps a shared community space that people of all ages, races, and genders can access.
- 03** | In a Group Interview, be certain to have one person asking the questions and other team members taking notes and capturing what the group is saying.
- 04** | Come prepared with a strategy to engage the quieter members of the group. This can mean asking them questions directly or finding ways to make the more vocal members of the group recede for a moment.
- 05** | Group Interviews are a great setting to identify who you might want to go deeper with in a Co-Creation Session (p. 109).



## Expert Interview

Experts can fill you in quickly on a topic, and give you key insights into relevant history, context, and innovations.

Though the crux of the Inspiration phase is talking with the people you're designing for, you can gain valuable perspective by talking to experts. Experts can often give you a systems-level view of your project area, tell you about recent innovations—successes and failures—and offer the perspectives of organizations like banks, governments, or NGOs. You might also look to experts for specific technical advice.

### STEPS

**TIME**

60-90 minutes

**DIFFICULTY**

Moderate

**WHAT YOU'LL NEED**

Pens, camera, notebook

**PARTICIPANTS**

Design team, expert

- 01** | Determine what kind of expert you need. If you're working in agriculture, perhaps an agronomist. In reproductive health? A doctor or policymaker may be a good bet.
- 02** | When recruiting your experts, give them a preview of the kinds of questions you'll be asking and let them know how much of their time you'll need.
- 03** | Choose experts with varying points of view. You don't want the same opinions over and over.
- 04** | Ask smart, researched questions. Though you should come prepared with an idea of what you'd like to learn, make sure your game plan is flexible enough to allow you to pursue unexpected lines of inquiry.
- 05** | Record your Expert Interview with whatever tools you have. A pen and paper work fine.

## Define Your Audience



Consider the broad spectrum of people who will be touched by your design solution.

Before you dig into your in-context research, it's critical to know who you're designing for. You're bound to learn more once you're in the field, but having an idea of your target audience's needs, contexts, and history will help ensure that you start your research by asking smart questions. And don't limit your thinking just to the people you're designing for. You may need to consider governments, NGOs, other businesses, or competitors.

### STEPS

**TIME**

30-60 minutes

**DIFFICULTY**

Easy

**WHAT YOU'LL NEED**

Pen, paper, Post-its

**PARTICIPANTS**

Design team

- 01** | With your team, write down the people or groups that are directly involved in or reached by your project. Are you designing for children? For farmers? Write all the groups down on Post-its and put them on a wall so you can visualize your audience.
- 02** | Now add people or groups who are peripherally relevant, or are associated with your direct audience.
- 03** | Think about the connections these people have with your topic. Who are the fans? Who are the skeptics? Who do you most need on your side? Add them to the wall.
- 04** | Now arrange these Post-its into a map of the people involved in your challenge. Save it and refer to it as you move through the Inspiration phase.



## Conversation Starters

Conversation Starters put a bunch of ideas in front of a person and seek to spark their reactions.

Conversation Starters are a great way to get a reaction and begin a dialogue. The idea here is to suggest a bunch of ideas around a central theme to the people you're designing for and then see how they react. The ideas you generate for your Conversation Starters are totally sacrificial, so if they don't work, drop them and move on. The goal here is to encourage creativity and outside-the-box thinking from the people you're designing for.

### STEPS

**TIME**

30-60 minutes

**DIFFICULTY**

Moderate

**WHAT YOU'LL NEED**

Pens, notebook

**PARTICIPANTS**

Design team, people you're designing for

- 01** | Determine what you want the people you're designing for to react to. If you're designing a sanitation system you might come up with a bunch of Conversation Starters around toilets or privacy.
- 02** | Now come up with many ideas that could get the conversation started. What is the toilet of the future, the toilet of the past, a super toilet, the president's toilet? Come up with a list of ideas like this to share with the person you're designing for.
- 03** | Once you're with the person you're designing for, start by telling them that you're interested in their reactions to these Conversation Starters. Some may be silly, some may be absurd, you're only looking to get their opinions.
- 04** | As the person you're designing for shares her take on your Conversation Starters, be open to however she interprets the concepts. When one of them strikes her, ask more questions. You can learn a lot about how she thinks and what she might want out of your solution.

## METHOD IN ACTION



### Conversation Starters

The name says it all: Conversation Starters are meant to do just that. But beyond getting the person you're designing for talking, the goal is to get them thinking. This Method is a great way to open a person up to creative thinking and to then learn more about her attitudes about the subject.

An IDEO.org design team working in Uganda with Ugafode and the Mennonite Economic Development Associates on how to design formal savings tools for low-income Ugandans used Conversation Starters to plumb how Ugandans felt about banks. By presenting them with very basic ideas about banks and then soliciting a response, the team came to some pretty compelling insights.

They learned that some Ugandans thought banks were only for “big money,” and not the small sums that they might otherwise be dealing in. Another person told the team that he wants his money working for the community, a benefit that he did not think would happen if it were sitting in a bank.

The big insight that came from the dialogue that the Conversation Starters sparked was that Ugandans are currently using all manner of informal savings devices. And for a bank to work in this community, it would have to play alongside, not necessarily replace, the existing informal services and systems on which people rely.

When you're using Conversation Starters, remember that the goal is to get people talking. If the person you're talking to doesn't have much of a response to one, move right onto the next. Keep going until you find something that works, then keep the conversation going with open-ended questions. Premade cards are a great device to get the conversation started and give people something to react to. This is also a chance to get people thinking creatively so feel free to ask outlandish questions to keep the conversation flowing.