

APPENDIX:

Interview Questions

The ability to ask well-crafted and intelligent questions is a valuable skill. Asking the right questions elicits useful responses, helps gather critical feedback and information, and often prompts people to think profoundly. When our colleagues, partners and community stakeholders think more deeply than before, new ideas, new answers and new possibilities emerge. We all use many different types of questions in our day-to-day life and in our work. To begin with, conflict analysis team members should be able to distinguish between categories of questions, some of which should be used during a data gathering conversation and others should be avoided.¹²

AVOID:

- **Closed questions** are limited by default because they invite yes/no answers and do not encourage the speaker to provide more details. Example: “Do you think the colonial administration deliberately promoted conflict?” Avoid defining answers. Example: “Do you think that was democratic or authoritarian?”
- **Leading questions** attempt to guide the respondent’s answer. These should be avoided altogether in a listening conversation. Example: “Would you agree that the economic development projects carried out by our partners have been helpful in strengthening your community?”
- **Multiple-choice questions** are often used in written surveys and are not usually appropriate in an interview for conflict analysis.

USE:

- **Open questions** start with *what, how, when, where, who* and invite the speaker to describe things. Examples: “What did your community do to handle conflicts in the period before the war?” (descriptive); “How do you feel about efforts to promote dialogue among groups in tension?” (exploring attitudes/feelings); “How could land issues be handled more effectively?” (application/suggestion)
- **Icebreaking questions** can be helpful, depending on the context, in starting the conversation with a small talk to build rapport. Examples: “How has the harvest been this year?” “How long has your family lived in this community?”
- **Probing/follow-up questions** seek to draw out additional information and details. Examples: “That’s really interesting, can you tell me more?” “Could you describe a situation when you felt engaged in the decision-making process?”
- **Theoretical/hypothetical questions** can help the person to offer additional opinions, conclusions and recommendations by offering a new scenario in which to apply their experience. Usually these questions start with the words: *Imagine... Suppose... Predict... If..., then... How might... What are some possible consequences...?* Example: “If there were a more inclusive decision making process, what might the effect be on the main conflict issues?”; “If you were to advise a local government administrator about how to minimise this conflict, what would you tell them?”; “What are some possible consequences if land and resources issues are not dealt with more effectively?”

¹² This appendix was adapted from *Listening Manual*, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA, draft 2010).

The question types listed below provide some ideas on how to move a conversation beyond simple descriptions to higher and cumulative levels of analysis.

EVALUATIVE/ JUDGMENTAL	<p>You might begin a conversation by noting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You have seen various efforts to resolve these conflict issues...” <p>Questions to follow this opening may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think have been the impacts of those efforts? • How do you judge the impacts/outcomes of these efforts? • What do you see as the pluses and minuses of these many efforts for your society/community? • How do you feel about these many efforts? • In your opinion, what is the appropriate and useful for outsiders to do in this country? What is the right role for foreigners? • How would you interpret the recent changes in the community consultation process?
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The next two types of Questions—Evidence and Clarification—are useful for following up an opening such as this. There is some similarity between these two types of questions. However, there is an essential difference that matters as you try to hear—really hear—and understand and assess the implications of the ideas that are offered: evidence questions are used to find out why someone thinks the impacts are as they have said, asking them to tie their judgments and opinions to some facts/experiences, that is the evidence that underlies their opinion, whereas clarification questions are used to be sure the listener really understands what the person means.



EVIDENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see happening here? • Would you say more about that? • What is your experience that makes you see this way? • Why do you think that is positive? Negative? How? For whom? For how long? • What factors do you think led to that? • How did that make you feel?
CLARIFICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Could you explain what you mean? → Am I right that what you are saying is...? → Let me be sure I understand you right—do you mean...?
ANALYTICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Why did x result when y happened? → Why did that person think that x was good/bad when another person thought it was bad? → Why do you think y happened? Why did it happen then? → Why do you think those factors led to that outcome?
APPLICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → When y happens in your situation, what impact does it have on you, your family and your community? → What can be done to improve the situation? → What can be done to make the positive impacts from these actions have lasting effect?
ABSTRACT / HYPOTHETICAL	<p>Abstract questions are getting at how people understand connections among things; how they understand causation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What advice would you give to someone like you in another country (or in another community) who was going to deal with similar issues? → If you were to start over again, how might you act differently in relation to assistance in order to get better outcomes? → In general, if x happened, would y also happen? (if followed this with “Why” – this would be an analytical question)

Ideas for Practicing Good Questioning Skills

- Brainstorm with your colleagues how you would phrase questions to get beyond the specific issues to broader problems, larger impacts, effectiveness of peace efforts and the expectations people have. You may decide to record suggested questions on a board or flipchart. Remember these should not be seen as a questionnaire or interview protocol, but simply to serve as a reminder of the type of questions the team wants to focus on.
- Use role plays! Practice forming and asking questions appropriate to the local context. Practice listening skills through these role plays. You may want to use “fishbowls” with some participants: doing role plays in front of the group to use as an example for feedback and discussion.

