RESEARCH PROJECT LIFECYCLE

Full Research Plan: Interviews and Focus Groups

Stage: Research Development → Gate 3 · Other versions: Trials and Quasi-Experiments (the main Full Research Plan), Questionnaires and Surveys, Secondary Data Analysis, Mixed Methods

How to use this form

Use this version of the Full Research Plan when the main method is **interviews or focus groups**. It sets out who you will talk to, what you will ask, and how you will analyse what they say, **before any data is collected**. It doubles as your **pre-registration**. It takes **three to five pages**.

- **Who completes it:** the Research Lead.
- **Who checks it:** the Ethics Reviewer, then the Gate 3 Reviewer, as part of the Gate 3 Readiness and Project Sign-Off.
- **Use it for the right question.** Interviews are best for understanding how and why something works, what people experience, and how to design a better intervention. They cannot show on their own whether something caused a change.
- **Plan the analysis now.** Decide how you will code and theme what people say before you start, so findings are not shaped by what you hoped to hear.
- **Think about who asks the questions.** People may answer differently if the interviewer also delivers their service.
- **Changes are allowed, but must be visible.** After sign-off, record every change as a dated amendment with the reason.

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A. The project

Most of this section carries forward from earlier templates. Check it is still right.

Field	Your answer
A1. Project title *(essential)* As on the Feasibility and Business Capability Assessment.	
A2. Project reference From the Research Portfolio Register.	

Field	Your answer
A3. Research Lead *(essential)* Name and role.	
A4. Gate 2 decision date *(essential)* The date the project was judged "This research project is feasible".	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
A5. Plan version *(essential)* For example, version 1.0. Every amendment after sign-off gets a new version number.	

B. Question and aims

Field	Your answer
B1. Research question *(essential)* The main question the interviews will answer. For example: "What helps or stops young people taking up mentoring after they are offered it?"	
B2. Aims *(essential)* What you want to understand, and how the findings will be used.	
B3. Why this matters *(essential)* A short summary of the evidence and the gap this study fills. Carry this forward from the Evidence Scoping Summary and update it.	

C. Approach and sample

Field	Your answer
C1. Method *(essential)* Pick one.	☐ One-to-one interviews ☐ Focus groups ☐ Both

Field	Your answer
C2. Interview format *(essential)* Pick one. **Structured:** the same questions in the same order for everyone. **Semi-structured:** a topic guide, with room to follow up what people say. **Unstructured:** a broad topic, led mainly by the participant.	☐ Structured ☐ Semi-structured ☐ Unstructured
C3. Who will take part *(essential)* The groups you will talk to. For example: participants, family members, delivery staff, managers or partners.	
C4. How participants are chosen *(essential)* Pick one, then describe how it will work. **Purposive:** chosen to cover particular experiences or characteristics. **Maximum variation:** chosen to include as wide a range of views as possible. **Snowball:** participants suggest others. **Convenience:** whoever is available. Views may be narrower.	☐ Purposive ☐ Maximum variation ☐ Snowball ☐ Convenience ☐ Other
C5. Number of interviews or groups *(essential)* How many you plan, and how you will know when you have enough. For example: stop when new interviews no longer add new themes.	

D. Topic guide and interviewers

Field	Your answer
D1. Main topics *(essential)* The topics the interviews will cover, linked to the research question.	

Field	Your answer
D2. Draft questions and prompts Attach the topic guide.	
D3. Testing the guide *(essential)* How you will test it before starting. For example, one or two practice interviews.	
D4. Who will interview *(essential)* Who will carry out the interviews, and what training they will have. Avoid people interviewing those they support or manage, where you can.	

E. Collection and data

Field	Your answer
E1. Fieldwork start date *(essential)*	Date: _____ / _____ / _____
E2. Fieldwork end date *(essential)*	Date: _____ / _____ / _____
E3. Setting and format In person, by phone or by video, and where.	
E4. Recording and transcription *(essential)* How interviews will be recorded and written up, and by whom.	
E5. Consent, confidentiality and data storage *(essential)* How consent is recorded, how quotes will be anonymised, where data is stored, and when recordings are deleted.	

Field	Your answer
E6. Wellbeing and safeguarding *(essential)* What happens if someone becomes upset, or tells you something that raises a safeguarding concern. Include where people can get support afterwards.	

F. Analysis plan

Write this before any interviews take place. It is the core of the pre-registration.

Field	Your answer
F1. Analysis approach *(essential)* How the data will be analysed. For example: thematic analysis or framework analysis. Say whether themes come from the data, from a set framework, or both.	
F2. Coding *(essential)* Who will code the data, whether a second person will check a share of it, and any software used.	
F3. Checking interpretations How you will test your reading of the data. For example: a second coder, discussing findings with participants, or looking for cases that do not fit.	
F4. Linking to other findings How these findings will be used alongside other data, such as trial results or delivery data.	

G. Limitations

Field	Your answer
G1. Known limitations *(essential)* For example: who did not take part, how the interviewer may have shaped answers, or how far views can be generalised.	
G2. What the findings can and cannot tell us *(essential)* Interviews explain experiences and reasons. They cannot show how common a view is, or whether an intervention caused a change.	

H. Pre-registration

Register this plan before any data collection or analysis starts. See the ResearchCore guide "Where to Pre-register" for options in different fields, including internal registration and your own website.

Field	Your answer
H1. Where it is registered *(essential)* Pick one.	☐ External registry ☐ Registered Report ☐ Internal pre-registration ☐ Our own website
H2. Registry name and reference The registry, the ID or link, or the internal document reference.	
H3. Date registered *(essential)*	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
H4. Embargo until If the details are hidden until a later date.	Date: ____ / ____ / _____

I. Plan status and sign-off

Field	Your answer
I1. Plan status *(essential)* Pick one.	☐ Draft ☐ Ready for Ethical Oversight ☐ Signed off ☐ Amended after sign-off
I2. Signed off by *(essential)* Research Lead name and role.	
I3. Sign-off date *(essential)*	Date: ____ / ____ / _____
I4. Amendments after sign-off List each change: the date, the version number, what changed and why.	

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