

## Visitor Services Project On foot Interviewer Training

### The Interview Process (2 minutes)

Each interviewer will have a daily goal for questionnaire distribution at their assigned site. Distribution goals will vary by site and will be listed on the sampling plan. Each interviewer will be given a supply of stamped questionnaires and associated forms to fill out. Please distribute questionnaires in numerical order. Our goal is to give every visitor group in the defined visitor population an equal chance of being selected to participate in the survey.

At the beginning of your shift, count the questionnaires in your bundle, check to see that they are in numerical order, that no numbers are missing and that all are stamped.

**Behave professionally and smile:** Interviewers should sit or stand at the imaginary line and count visitors as they cross the line to enter the park. Each interviewer who works in a particular location should work in the same location and follow the exact same procedure. When it is time to interview, the interviewer should stand to greet the visitor and conduct the interview. The interviewer must **always** be in a uniform (NPS, VIP or VSP) with a nametag. Sunglasses are okay, but lift the sunglasses briefly to make eye contact with the visitor during the interview. Focus on your interview—**do not** count visitors who pass by while you are interviewing.

Your priorities are: 1. safety (personal, visitor, staff), 2. resource protection, 3. park operations, and 4. VSP study. Safety is your number one priority. If at any time during an interview, you feel threatened or unsafe, remove yourself immediately from the situation and report the incident to the nearest law enforcement officer and to the survey coordinator. If the weather gets dangerous (such as lightning), get to a safe location. Know what to do.

### Determining the interval

Start each shift (or after break or lunch) with the very **first** visitor group as soon as you are ready. A group is defined as people who are traveling together in a park. It might be one person or a family with a friend, or a church group.

To determine who to interview next, divide the number of questionnaires that you are supposed to distribute/hour (e.g. 7) by 60 minutes. The result is 9 minutes. We do not use timed intervals due to the possibility of bias, so count the number of visitors for 9 minutes and use the resulting number as your interval. So if 34 people cross your imaginary line in 9 minutes, then try using every 34th person as your interval. After an hour passes, check how many questionnaires have been distributed—if it is too many, then increase the interval, or too few, then decrease the interval.

Greet the group and briefly explain that the NPS is conducting a survey. Explain the reason for the study as well as the fact that participation is voluntary. A sample follows:

"Hello! The National Park Service is conducting a visitor study at (park) to learn more about visitors and their opinions about services and facilities in the park. The superintendent has asked us to distribute a mail-back questionnaire (turn questionnaire over and point out the stamp) that you can take with you. The questionnaire takes about 20 minutes to fill out sometime after your visit, then drop it in any U.S. mailbox. Who in your group has the next birthday (must be a person 16 years of age or older)? Are you willing to participate?"

(If use your own words, all of the elements listed above should be mentioned)

Record each contact on the Contact & Front-End Interview Form. For all contacts, check whether the visitor or visitor group agrees, refuses, or has already received a questionnaire.

If the person refuses, see if any other adult in the group will participate. If not, simply say, "Enjoy your visit/trip." It is **NOT** a problem if people don't want to participate—we'd rather have them refuse now than to never return their questionnaire. Please write the reason why (not enough English and the language they speak, not interested, in a hurry, etc.) in the "Comments" column of the Contact & Front-End Interview Form. Then interview the **very next group** that approaches.

If the group has previously received a questionnaire, thank them for participating.

If the group agrees to participate, say you have a few quick questions. Then ask:

- What type of group (alone, family, friends, family & friends, other) are you traveling with?
- How many people are in your group (only the ones visiting the park)? **Always ask**, since groups sometimes get separated or travel in multiple vehicles. For visitors in tour groups, record the larger group size only.
- How many adults, 18 years and older, are in your personal group?
- How many children, 17 years and younger, are in your personal group?
- What is the age of the adult who will fill out the questionnaire?

Hand the questionnaire to the person and ask him/her to provide their name, address, and phone number /email address on a mailing label so that the superintendent can send them a thank-you postcard (including foreign addresses). This information should be as legible as possible—check for complete addresses, zip codes, country names, etc. The number on the mailing label should match the number on the questionnaire. There should be a mailing label for every group that received a questionnaire. If a group doesn't want to provide an address, simply write an "X" on the mailing label for that questionnaire.

Thank the person and get them on their way. Be sure to record the time of the interview. Use the assigned interval to approach every "nth" visitor group and repeat the process. Using this methodology, the VSP averages a 75% response rate.

## Accurate Paperwork

**Match questionnaire numbers:** Distribute questionnaires in numerical order, and match the numbers on the questionnaire, address label, and Contact & Front-End Interview Form. Make frequent checks of your paperwork and questionnaires to see that this is the case.

Fill out the questionnaire numbers in the space provided on the **address labels (use columns)** ahead of time when possible. This saves time and makes it easier to keep questionnaire numbers in sequence.

**Contact & Front-End Interview Form:** Write **every** visitor contact you make on this form, regardless of whether the group accepts, refuses, or has already received a questionnaire. Put a check in the appropriate column and record the time.

**Write everything down:** It is sometimes necessary to reconstruct what interviewers did while distributing questionnaires, so it is important that you write things down. This includes your initials, starting and stopping time, lunch breaks, weird things that happened, or anything else that might help us to figure out what you did without being able to ask you. Always write it down: too much information is better than too little.

**Address labels:** Fill out an address label for every questionnaire that is distributed. If the group refuses to provide an address, simply write an "X" on the label.

**One questionnaire per group:** Each group will receive only one questionnaire, even if the group consists of a number of families traveling together. All the group members should provide their input for the one questionnaire that the group received.

**Bus/tour Groups:** The rule of **one** questionnaire per group still applies.

## Changing the Interval

The survey process uses random, stratified sampling in which every "nth" visitor group is asked to participate. The "interval" in the sampling plan is based on visitation figures from the previous year.

Ideally, the interval will work just right for the entire interview day (you'll meet the distribution goal just as the interview day ends). However, visitation figures are not perfect and year-to-year and day-to-day visitation fluctuates, so changing the interval may be necessary. Try to meet your distribution goal within the assigned interview shift. For example, you should not have all of your questionnaires distributed halfway through your shift, nor should you have only half of your questionnaires distributed at the end of your shift.

Try not to change the interval too often, but don't hesitate to do so if it's necessary. Selecting intervals in the field is more art than science, so don't fret over what you have chosen. Mark the change in the interval column of the Contact & Front-End Interview Form and continue monitoring your distribution rate. If necessary, you can sample every visitor group.

Remember, your goal is to hand out your last questionnaire of the day at the end of your assigned shift (within 15 minutes of the time).

***People requesting questionnaires:*** Occasionally people who are not the "right" group will request a questionnaire. Explain that this is a scientific study and try to dissuade them. If they insist on getting one, give them one, then after they leave, write on the contact sheet that the questionnaire was given out on request—it will not be counted as part of the study.

Remember also to use sunscreen, a hat, and drinking water.