

# Face to Face interviewing in times of COVID-19

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**ESOMAR has been asked for advice on safety procedures and protocols to consider in respect of sending individual face to face interviewers back into field over the next few weeks, in those geographies where COVID-19 may be in retreat.**

**The advice below is generic, is designed to be practical, and should be read in conjunction with the relevant guidance provided on a dynamic basis from National Governments, and in conjunction with the advice available from the National Market Research Association in each respective geography. You can find the contact details of these associations on your country pages: <https://www.esomar.org/country-overview>**

Please Note: This is not a formal code or a guideline.

The points are designed to act as a check list of areas to consider in the protection both of interviewers/briefing staff and of members of the public within the interviewing process, together with some other factors we believe may be of relevance. It may not be exhaustive in the context of the geographies in which you are operating and should at all times be reviewed in the context of your local authority or Governmental advice.

## **Whether to open face to face interviewing capability/timing considerations**

- ESOMAR does not recommend that you pursue face to face interviewing in any Country or Region/District unless you are confident that you are able to do so without posing any COVID-19 transmission risk to respondents and without posing any COVID-19 transmission risk to fieldworkers; either within the boundaries of your own organisation or through sub-contractors. This is in accordance with Art.1 of the [ICC/ESOMAR Code](#).
- ESOMAR recommends that you strongly consider reputational issues in relation to contact with members of the public when considering whether you recommence face to face interviewing. For example, you may consider that you

can conduct interviewing safely, but it may also be the case that members of the public do not yet feel that it is safe or appropriate to allow interviewers into their homes. By pushing this issue, you may bring the industry into disrepute and/or cause distress to members of the public and to interviewers. This would be a violation of Art.9 of the [ICC/ESOMAR Code](#).

- You should consider whether COVID-19 related issues are likely to impact response patterns in specific geographies – especially with regards to vulnerable groups. It is worth soft testing to ascertain whether this may be the case, the possible impacts on data and whether/how this fit into the client brief. Considerations here could be wide ranging including the availability of the field force, changed patterns of product distribution/availability, sampling method. In terms of sampling for example, in the event that some parts of a nationally representative sample are contained within a high incidence COVID-19 area and some in a low COVID-19 incidence area, this may have an impact on both planning/feasibility of the study and the data collected.
- Any legal implications of the decision to recommence fieldwork should also be considered.

### **General practices to protect people involved in face to face interviewing**

Generally, ESOMAR would recommend consideration of the following practices. Again, these should be considered in the context of Government and legislative guidelines and in the context of the National Market Research Association guidance within each respective geography.

#### **1. Preparation of proper briefing materials around the COVID-19 situation for all research staff and for members of the public.**

This should naturally include all of the steps being taken by the agency which are designed to act as a measure of protection within the research process. This should be clear and easy to understand. These steps should also actively refer back to national measures and government guidance.

We would recommend that you consider both the issue of general fieldwork practice, and then for each specific project which may have specific requirements. Research staff who interact with clients should be briefed in addition to all relevant operational staff, fieldwork coordinators and fieldworkers. Sub-contractors should also be an active part of this briefing. Some consultation

and testing may be an appropriate step as a precursor to design of the briefing materials and approach. The text below will help you evaluate what you need to include in the briefing materials. The end client for the project should actively be consulted about the specific procedures being recommended for the project at the outset. Some of the points of recommendation may add to research costs.;

2. Consideration of the actual practices that you plan to follow in order to protect the research workforce and members of the public. This will vary depending on the nature of the face to face contact, in the context of which the following actions should be considered;

a. Regular COVID-19 testing of all staff/interviewers facing members of the public. Development of a clear plan of contact and monitored action should any interviewer/relevant staff member test positive. Consideration of the trigger point which may be required to return to work; for example, a negative test/medical certificate.

b. Ensuring that interviewers who have a high temperature and/or a cough are self-isolating. Development of a clear plan of contact and monitored action should any interviewer/relevant staff member be self-isolating. Consideration of the trigger point which may be required to return to work; for example, a negative test/medical certificate.

c. Ensuring provision of and comprehensive use of face masks by interviewers, and the medical grade of these masks. It may be appropriate in some circumstances to provide sealed masks to respondents for use within the interview, depending on the nature of the project.

d. Ensuring provision of and comprehensive use of hand sanitiser and secure waste disposal.

e. Ensuring that interviewers wash their hands before and after every interview.

f. Social distancing. Interviewers should be instructed not to shake hands or to have any physical contact with any respondent. Social distancing rules should follow local guidance, for example, 2 metres, and interviewers must ensure any venue meets these requirements. If possible do not share keyboards or

touchscreen surfaces with respondents, and if required ensure adequate protection (e.g. gloves, wipes etc) are available and utilised.

g. Use of a fresh pair of disposable gloves for each interview.

h. Minimise cross contamination by not providing or accepting any refreshments.

i. Devising a method of cleaning interviewing equipment that may be used in field. For example, wiping down tablets, tables, and chairs which are used by face to face interviewers between each interview, ensuring that wipes used are mandated, supplied by the agency and are fit for purpose. (disinfectant suitable for use on electronic items). Ensure that the fieldworker is properly trained on how to do this and this is briefed accordingly. (for example, the risks of individuals spraying alcohol or disinfectants onto electronic items should be actively considered and steps taken to avoid this)

j. Devising a method for quarantine of paper and other materials to be used during the interview. If appropriate. For example, seal and store questionnaires for an appropriate period of time to then be opened at the interview might be an approach worth considering depending on local guidance on COVID-19 half-life.

k. Consideration on approach to respondent incentivisation if appropriate.

**3. Pre-Briefing and recruitment practices.** The following approaches may be helpful to consider;

a. Use of virtual approaches (video) to brief interviewers. In order to compensate for the lack of actual contact, smaller groups could be considered to allow for the necessary discussion and questions about the COVID-19 situation and the procedures being followed. Use of more experienced interviewers should also be considered.

b. Contacting respondents by telephone or other means should be considered in order to ascertain agreement to be interviewed in order to avoid negative reactions and responses around the COVID-19 situation.

c. The pre-screening questionnaire should consider the issues of COVID-19, for example, to eliminate any households who are self-isolating, where anyone has suffered symptoms within the last 2 weeks (depending on local guidance), where any household member has a temperature or a cough, or any of the currently identified COVID-19 symptom list.

d. We would recommend that agreement to interview should be conditional on acceptance of all of the recommended practices and against a pre agreed 'framework for protection' with the relevant member of the public. This would require clarity about the steps being taken to protect BOTH the interviewer and the interviewee.

e. We would recommend that interviews are not carried out in the following areas/groups;

- Geographic areas which have a high incidence of COVID-19 or that are currently under strict lockdown conditions.
- Areas which are close to hospitals, healthcare units, or public spaces where it is not possible to maintain social distancing.
- Amongst groups of individuals who are likely to be immunocompromised. For example; elderly groups, pregnant women, individuals who have life threatening conditions.