

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES FAMILY INVESTMENT ADMINISTRATION	TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE MANUAL	
INTERVIEWING 202	COMAR 07.03.03.04	APPLICATION 200

202.1 PURPOSE

An eligibility interview may be a face-to-face interview in an office or home setting or, a telephone interview. In either case, there are definite steps that must be followed to help insure the goals and objectives of the interview are reached. This section provides guidelines for use in face-to-face and telephone interviewing. Case managers should complete telephone interviews unless the customer specifically asks for a face to face interview.

202.2 WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

- A. An interview is a specialized, structured formal communication process for the exchange of information with a goal of determining eligibility.
 - 1. **Specialized** means relying on conscious active listening, empathizing, interactive participation and observation.
 - 2. **Structured** means a process with a beginning, middle and an end.
 - 3. **Formal** means that two people are involved, playing specific roles.
 - 4. **Communication** means using both verbal and non-verbal symbols.
- B. Using well developed interviewing skills the interviewer can go beyond eligibility determination to focus on problem solving.

202.3 STEPS IN THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

- A. Plan – be prepared.
- B. Open – use a social greeting.
- C. Introduce – explain the process and confidentiality.
- D. Gather information – use active listening, questions and probes.
- E. Evaluate and problem-solve – use information gathered to develop a plan of action.
- F. Summarize – recount what was said and what should happen next.
- G. Close – thank the interviewee and provide a chance for final questions/thoughts.
- H. Generate narratives and/or notices.

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202.4 INTERVIEWING BARRIERS

- A. **Internal barriers** occur both consciously and subconsciously by placing personal standards on the applicants/customers.
- B. **External barriers** are time constraints, caseloads, budgets, staffing, and other considerations that the interviewer has little control over.
- C. **Technical barriers** include age, ethnicity, geographical or gender-related communication styles, language differences, and other factors that inhibit good communication.

202.5 ROLES IN INTERVIEWING

- A. Interviewer's role is to:
 - 1. Control the interview process
 - 2. Acknowledge the individuality of the applicant/customer
 - 3. Lead and motivate the applicant/customer to be willing and able to participate
 - 4. Gather information, evaluate the information and work with the applicant/customer to solve problems
 - 5. Combine feeling, attitude and skilled interview technique with interpersonal relationship building skills
- B. Interviewee's role is to:
 - 1. Follow the lead of the interviewer
 - 2. Seek assistance and help
 - 3. Be willing and able to provide complete and honest information
 - 4. Cooperate with the process

202.6 PREPARATION

Preparation should take place prior to each and every interview. It involves:

- A. Adjusting your focus to the case at hand.

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B. Familiarizing yourself with relevant past information.

- This includes running any necessary clearances yourself or reviewing clearances such as unemployment, The Work Number, and SVES that someone else runs for you.

C. Ensuring your attitude is professional.

D. Setting your intent on gathering complete and accurate information and providing the applicant/customer with as much information that is available or applicable.

202.7 COMPONENTS OF THE INTERVIEW

A. **Opening statements** – Make the applicant/customer your PAL: Purpose, Agenda, and Limit

1. Explain the **purpose** of the interview
2. Outline the **agenda**
3. Inform him/her of the amount of time **limit** for the interview

B. **Questions** – Ask articulate, direct but respectful questions with the intention of gathering sufficient information to accurately assess the applicant/customer's needs. Types of questions include:

1. **Broad questions:** Invite a free flow of information and allow the interviewee to “get things off his/her chest”. However, the interviewee may ramble allowing the interviewer little control.

Examples: “Would you please tell me about yourself?”
“What seems to be bothering you?”

2. **Narrow questions:** Restrict the flow of information and are used to obtain facts or demographics. The interviewer has more control.

Examples: “How old is your daughter?”
“What is your full name?”

3. **Open questions:** Invite the interviewee to give free-flow information, but the interviewer selects the topic for discussion.

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- They often uncover additional important information not requested but needs to be discussed further.

Examples: “What can you tell me about the training you received?”
“What seems to be bothering you about the work requirements?”

4. **Closed questions:** Are answered with “yes” or “no” or may offer answer choices.
 - a. These provide a very structured interview, are less time consuming and give the interviewer a high degree of control.
 - b. The high level of interviewer control leaves little opportunity to uncover additional important information and may lessen applicant/customer participation.

Examples: “Are you a US citizen”
“Does lack of child care keep you from participating in a job search?”

5. **Leading questions:** Are structured so that the most appropriate or preferred answer is implied in the question.

Example: “You must submit to a substance abuse screening. You don’t use drugs or alcohol do you?”

- C. **Probes** – A verbal or nonverbal behavior used when an answer is irrelevant, unclear or incomplete. Probing keeps control of the interview, but is not a cross-examination. There are 7 types:

1. **Silence:** “Please give me an example.” (Pause)
2. **Encouragement:** “Please continue.”
3. **Immediate Elaboration:** “What else can you tell me about your son’s illness?”
4. **Retrospective Elaboration:** “Earlier you told me that your daughter is ill, please tell me more about his illness.”
5. **Immediate Clarification:** “What does your live in partner say that makes you feel he will object to child care?”

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6. **Retrospective Clarification:** “Earlier you said that your live in partner would not like it if you placed your son in child care. What causes you to say that?”
 7. **Mutation:** “You’ve told me what brings you here today, but now I need you to tell me about the other members of your household.”
- D. **Non-verbals** – Disclose feelings and real meaning, the validity of spoken message and can have a major effect on the interview relationship. Some examples are:
1. Interpersonal space and physical distance
 2. Use of time and pacing of questions
 3. Silence
 4. Eye contact
 5. Body language
 6. Voice (volume, pitch, rate of speech)
 7. Attitude
- E. **Active listening** – Requires paying attention to the entire message, both content and feeling, being empathetic, suspending judgment and using appropriate feedback. It means:
1. Using both eyes and ears.
 2. Checking the accuracy of what you see and hear by paraphrasing, reflecting and probing.
 3. Wording interview questions and probes around what you hear.

202.8 CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

- A. Knowing how to close an interview can prevent receiving unnecessary and time-consuming follow-up phone calls from the applicant/customer.
- B. By taking a few moments at the end of the interview to properly close it, time can be saved and accuracy improved.
- C. Suggestions for questions to ask before the interview is ended:

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1. Is there anything else you need to tell me before we end the interview?
 2. Do you understand everything we've discussed and accomplished today?
 3. Do you have any questions for me?
 4. Do you understand all that we did today?
- D. If the applicant/customer is not eligible for the programs they applied for, be sure to know what other resources are available from the local department and/or other agencies and provide that information.

202.9 INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- A. A telephone interview is a phone meeting to establish rapport and gather necessary information to determine eligibility.
1. Another method of determining eligibility
 2. Affects all programs
 3. Expansion of other telephone work
 4. More efficient for case managers, applicants and customers
- B. Conduct a professional interview (see 202.7 - Components of the interview in this section).
- C. The voice is a complex and very important communication tool.
1. Volume, pitch, modulation and rate of speech all send a message to the applicant/customer
 2. The following also influence what the applicant/customer "hears" during a telephone interview:
 - a. Use of time
 - b. Pacing of questions and probes
 - c. Use of silence
 - d. Attitude of voice – word choice and tone

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3. Interpreting a message by hearing the applicant/customer's voice means:
 - a. What is the voice telling me?
 - b. Does the voice match the words?
 - c. Does it tell me the applicant/customer's attitude?
 - d. Can it guide me in handling the applicant/customer and controlling the interview?

- D. Preparation – As in face-to-face interviews, the telephone interview requires preparation.
 1. Get organized
 2. Decide the objective of the call
 3. Familiarize yourself with relevant past and any known current information
 4. Write down all information needed
 5. Set your intent on gathering complete and accurate information and providing the applicant/customer with as much information that's available or applicable.

- E. Confirm understanding – Ask questions until you feel clear on all of the issues, then request the applicant/customer repeat them back to you.

- F. Using a good closing statement can prevent fielding unnecessary and time-consuming follow-up phone calls to and from the applicant/customer.

Examples: “Is there anything else you need to tell me before we hang up?”
“Do you have any questions for me?”
“Do you know what information you need to send/bring in?”
“Do you understand all that we said?”

202.10 General Interviewing Guidelines

- **Respect** and value the applicant/customer as an individual
- Work to establish and maintain good rapport

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- **Remain calm** and do not get heated or emotional; do not react negatively to difficult interviewee behaviors or take them personally
- Acknowledge the other person's feelings
- **Use open questions** that leave room for answer and exploration
- Keep questions/probes relevant to the purpose of the interview
- Match your vocabulary and word choice to the customer's frame of reference
- **Avoid jargon and acronyms** (recon, TCA, POC, etc.)