

TEMPLATE FOR COST ANALYSIS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

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#### Overview

Interviews with program[[1]](#footnote-1) leaders and program personnel provide detailed insights into the activities associated with a given program and the resources or “ingredients” needed to implement it. Understanding the activities and ingredients is the first step towards accurately estimating the costs of resources needed to implement the program. This document provides a template for a Cost Analysis Interview Protocol[[2]](#footnote-2) that users can customize for a variety of education programs. It is designed to collect data according to the ingredients method of estimating costs (see [Levin et al., 2018](https://books.google.com/books/about/Economic_Evaluation_in_Education.html?id=ASGkDgAAQBAJ)) and to inform the following cost analysis research questions:

1. What types and amounts of resources/ingredients are required to implement program X?
2. How does resource use differ across sites implementing program X?

You should adapt the protocol to match the design of your cost analysis and the type of program you are studying. Not every question in the protocol will be relevant to every program but, for most educational programs, people’s time is the most important resource so you should focus most of your interview time on this topic. You may be able to answer some questions in advance of the interview by searching online for information about the program and study sites, or by reviewing program documents and past evaluations. We used the following assumptions in building the protocol questions but you can alter questions to reflect your own study context:

* **Student program.** The protocol assumes the program serves K-12 students and targets student outcomes. However, the protocol can be readily modified for a program serving teacher participants and teacher outcomes, postsecondary students or other types of participants. For programs targeting teachers, the training component may be the entire program.
* **School-based program.** The protocol assumes the program is implemented at the school level. However, it can be easily modified for a program implemented at the district or classroom level, or in another setting.
* **Assumes interviewee is a program leader.** Ideally, you will interview multiple personnel in each of the various roles associated with a program, but this is not always feasible. At a minimum, you should interview a program leader to get a broad overview of the program. This should be a person who oversees the regular implementation of the program, e.g., a grade level chair, counselor, or parent coordinator. This protocol can also be adapted for interviews of other personnel who implement but do not lead the program. For these interviews, you should generally limit questions to the specific activities in which that person is involved. Program developers and vendors may also be interviewed but often report on recommended implementation rather than actual implementation in practice.
* **Concurrent data collection:** The protocol assumes that the interviewer is interested in data on the current operation of the program. It can be modified for retrospective or prospective data collection.
* **Start-up and ongoing activities.** The protocol assumes that there are start-up activities that are required to initiate the program (e.g., initial hiring and training) and on-going activities (e.g., service provision and monitoring). Eliminate irrelevant questions if you are only interested in start-up costs or ongoing costs.

#### How to read the protocol

The interview protocol is comprised of the following sections:

1. **Introduction**: sample language to introduce the purpose of the interview to the interviewee.
2. **General information:** questions about the site and nature of the program.
3. **Activities:** questions about the various activities or phases of the program, such as training, planning, implementing, supporting, and supervising activities.
4. **Four Ingredient Categories: Personnel (including training), Facilities, Materials & Equipment,** and **Other/Miscellaneous** sections. These all ask about the various resources or ingredients needed to implement the program.

***Conducting the interview***

Interviews are best conducted in person but telephone or videoconference interviews are usually the most feasible. In some cases, an interviewee is unavailable to meet but is willing to complete the interview as a written questionnaire. This is not ideal because it precludes follow-on questioning and clarifications that are often needed for cost data, but it is better than nothing. If you do plan on using the protocol as a questionnaire, we recommend you learn as much as possible about the program implementation first so that you can set up the line of questioning to be followed without an interviewer’s guidance.

While asking questions about resource requirements may be considered an exempt research activity for Institutional Review Board purposes, we still recommend you collect informed consents and ask permission to record the interviews so you can re-listen to details later.

The following formatting conventions are employed in the protocol to help the interviewer:

* Plain text indicates language that should be spoken aloud by the interviewer to the interviewee.
* *Italicized script indicates notes to the interviewer that should not be spoken out loud.*
* [CAPITALIZED PARENTHETICALS] indicate where a particular name or word should be inserted to customize the protocol for your own study.

***Next steps after interviews***

Once you have completed interviews of relevant personnel, use the information to create or update an ingredients list for the program noting type and quantity of resources used to implement it. See [CAP Project Standards and Guidelines](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eb0d7c7df68b75104fbc784/t/5f15293674141a78699c058d/1595222328873/CAP+Project+Cost+Analysis+Guidelines_1.0.pdf) for details. If you are investigating variation in resource use across sites, set up your ingredients list to allow for different quantities and ingredient characteristics that could determine economic value at each site.

For a study that involves many sites, findings from interviews conducted with personnel from a few sites can be used to help design survey questions that can be administered across the other sites. This can allow you to feasibly collect information from all sites on key ingredients such as personnel time use and on the range of business-as-usual conditions.

Once you have established the quantity and quality of ingredients needed to implement the program, you will need to assign dollar (or other currency) values (“prices”) to each ingredient so that you can calculate the costs of each ingredient. If you plan to use local prices, you may need to follow up with interviewees for suitable sources. See also [CAP Project Standards and Guidelines](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eb0d7c7df68b75104fbc784/t/5f15293674141a78699c058d/1595222328873/CAP+Project+Cost+Analysis+Guidelines_1.0.pdf) Appendix III for suggestions.

You may need to ask one or more interviewees a few other follow-up, clarifying questions by phone or email. It is a good practice to share your ingredients list back with key implementers to check that the information is correct (“member checking”).

If you are conducting a cost-effectiveness analysis, or a cost-benefit analysis, you will need to estimate the costs of implementing any programs in which only control group students participate that can be considered direct alternatives to the program you are studying. You can subtract their costs from the costs of [PROGRAM] to produce the difference in costs (incremental costs) between treatment and control groups to align with the difference in effects that you are estimating.

*Suggested citation: Hollands, F.M., Pratt-Williams, J., & Shand, R. (2020). Template for cost analysis interview protocol. Cost Analysis in Practice (CAP) Project. https://capproject.org/resources*

# INTERVIEW PROTOCOL TEMPLATE

#### Introduction for Respondent

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. The goal of this interview is to understand how [PROGRAM] is implemented at [INTERVIEWEE'S SCHOOL] so that we can inform decision-makers at other schools what it might take to implement the program at their own school. I will begin by asking you for some general information about [PROGRAM] and [INTERVIEWEE'S SCHOOL]. Then I will ask you to describe the activities associated with [PROGRAM] and the resources needed for successful implementation such as personnel, equipment, materials, and facilities. Usually, the most important resources needed to implement an educational program is people’s time to participate in training and to deliver the program, so that’s what I’ll be asking most of my questions about. I am also interested in contributions like volunteer time or equipment donations from community partners that are free to your school but still important for implementing [PROGRAM]. Do you have any questions for me before I begin?

#### General information

1. What is your job position at [SCHOOL]?
2. What is your role in [PROGRAM]?
3. How many days per year is [SCHOOL] open/operating and how many hours per day?
4. How many instructional hours are there in the day/week at [SCHOOL]?
5. When did **planning** for the implementation of [PROGRAM] at [SCHOOL] first begin?
6. When was [PROGRAM] first implemented at [SCHOOL], i.e., when were students first **served** by the program?
7. How often is [PROGRAM] run from beginning to end and for how long each time?
8. How many grade levels, classrooms, and students are served by [PROGRAM]?
9. Who decides which students are served by [PROGRAM]?
10. What happens to students who do not participate in [PROGRAM]?
11. Are there alternative programs to [PROGRAM] operating at [SCHOOL]? *If yes:*
    1. What are they and who could tell me more about them another time?

#### Program Activities

1. Please describe the activities that took place to **start up** [PROGRAM]. For example, planning meetings, hiring, initial training, meeting with participants and implementers to elicit buy-in, procuring space or special equipment. I am specifically interested in the start-up activities other schools would need to engage in if they wanted to implement [PROGRAM].
   * 1. What was the activity?
     2. How often did each activity occur, when, and for how long each time?
     3. Who was involved?
     4. Did any of [PROGRAM] start-up activities occur outside of normal school hours (e.g., before or after school, weekends, winter or summer break)?
2. What activities are part of **ongoing operations** for [PROGRAM]? For example, participant selection; service delivery; training; coaching; administrative, technical, operational or instructional support; monitoring/supervision; student assessment.
   * 1. What is the activity?
     2. How often does each activity occur, when, and for how long each time?
     3. Who is involved?
     4. Do any of the ongoing [PROGRAM] activities occur outside of normal school hours (e.g., before or after school, weekends, winter or summer break)?

#### Personnel

We want to be sure that we know about **all** personnel needed to implement [PROGRAM], including non-school employees. In describing the activities for [PROGRAM], you mentioned the following types of personnel: [INSERT LIST OF PERSONNEL MENTIONED].

1. Are there any other types of personnel involved in [PROGRAM] that we should know about?

*Follow-up about these personnel/staff if they are not mentioned:*

1. *Administrators, such as: principals, vice principals, deans, superintendent, assistant superintendents, other personnel from district office, state education agency, a community partner, funder, board member, third party service provider*
2. *Teacher support staff, such as: internal or external coaches or trainers, department heads, curricular specialists, professional development experts, teachers on special assignment*
3. *Teaching staff, including: certified teachers, paraprofessionals, teachers’ aides, student teachers, substitute teachers*
4. *Student support staff, such as: academic or guidance counselors, college counselors, nurses, social workers, student resource officers, school psychologists*
5. *Specialized staff, such as: librarians; information/technology, food services, transportation, and administrative support staff*
6. *Volunteers, such as: parents, community members, members of a non-profit or partner organization*

##### For **each** personnel type:

1. How many [PERSONNEL TYPE] are involved in [PROGRAM]?
   1. How are the [PERSONNEL TYPE] distributed across participants? (e.g., X per classroom, X per grade level, X per school)
   2. What are the qualifications associated with being a [INSERT ROLE]? (e.g., degree, specialized licensing/certification/training, years of experience)
2. Do any of the personnel who implement [PROGRAM] maintain time logs to record how many hours they spend on the program? *If yes:*
   1. Which personnel keep time logs and are you able to share the logs with me?
3. *For all personnel for whom time logs are not available:*

How many hours do [PERSONNEL TYPE] spend on [PROGRAM] in a typical week?

How many hours per week/days per year do [PERSONNEL] work?

1. *For key personnel implementing the program:*

What is the typical turnover rate for [PERSONNEL TYPE] (i.e., on average, how many years do they work in this position before moving to a different situation?)

1. *For instructional personnel:*

Are substitute teachers used to cover a [PERSONNEL TYPE]’s instructional obligations so that they can attend [PROGRAM] activities? *If yes:*

* + - * 1. How often does this occur? When?
        2. Does the [PERSONNEL TYPE] or anyone else spend time planning for or scheduling the substitute teachers?

##### Training

1. Is there any training required to implement [PROGRAM]? *If yes:*

I will ask about **start-up** and **ongoing** training separately and, for each one, I will ask you about the personnel involved as well as where it took place and any materials, equipment and other inputs needed specifically for training.

* 1. Was there training during the **start-up** phase of [PROGRAM]? *If yes:*
     1. Who provided the training?
     2. Who received this training?
     3. Are you able to share training attendance rosters showing trainers, training dates, hours and who attended?

***If start-up training attendance rosters are not available:***

* + 1. When were training sessions delivered, for how long, and to how many personnel each time?
    2. How many hours did the start-up training require and when did it occur?

***Resume for all:***

* + 1. Where did the start-up training take place (*facilities)?*
    2. What materials or equipment were required for the start-up training?
    3. Were any travel costs involved (e.g., mileage, airfare, lodging, per diem)?
    4. Were there any fees associated with the trainer providing the training?
    5. Were any attendees provided with stipends, per diems or other incentives?
  1. Is there any **ongoing training** for personnel implementing the program? *If yes:* 
     1. How often does this ongoing training occur?
     2. Who provides this training?
     3. Who receives this training?
     4. Are you able to share training attendance rosters showing trainers, training dates, hours and who attended this ongoing training?

***If ongoing training attendance rosters are not available:***

* + 1. When were/are ongoing training sessions delivered, for how long and to how many personnel each time?
    2. How many hours of ongoing training do personnel engage in and when does it occur?

***Resume for all:***

* + 1. Where does ongoing training take place (*facilities)?*
    2. What materials or equipment are required for this training?
    3. Are any travel costs involved (e.g., mileage, airfare, lodging, per diem)?
    4. Are there any fees associated with the trainer providing the training?
    5. Are any attendees provided with stipends, per diems or other incentives?

##### Parents/guardians [if applicable]

1. Do parents or guardians have a defined role in [PROGRAM]? (e.g., additional parent/teacher conferences, trainings, home-based activities). *If yes:*
2. How much time would you estimate the typical parent or guardian of a student participating in [PROGRAM] spends on program-related activities in a typical day/week/month/year?

#### Facilities

Now I am going to ask about the kinds of space or facilities that are needed for implementing any of the activities associated with [PROGRAM], including any off-site locations. In describing the activities for [PROGRAM], you mentioned the following locations: [INSERT LIST OF FACILITIES IF MENTIONED].

1. Are there any other spaces where [PROGRAM] activities take place?

*Follow-up about these facility types if they are not mentioned:*

1. *Rooms with specialized equipment (e.g., libraries, gyms, computer labs, art studios)*
2. *Conference rooms (e.g., for meetings, trainings, conferences)*
3. *Office space (e.g., offices for counselors, administrators, volunteers)*
4. *Outdoor or common space (e.g., playground, courtyard, field, parking lot)*
5. *Storage space*

##### For each facility type:

1. How many [FACILITY TYPE] are needed for [PROGRAM]
   1. For which activities?
   2. How many participants use each space at once?
2. What would you estimate the square footage to be for [FACILITY TYPE]?

*Guidelines to offer if needed: a typical Kindergarten classroom:30x30 or 900 sq ft; a standard office space:10x15 or 150 sq ft; an elementary school cafeteria: 2,000 sq ft; a secondary school gym: 3,200 sq ft; a secondary school auditorium: 7,000 sq ft.*

1. Is [FACILITY TYPE] dedicated to [PROGRAM], or is it also used for other purposes?
   1. How many hours is [FACILITY TYPE] used for [PROGRAM] in a typical week?
   2. *If used for other purposes*: What percentage of time the facility is open for use in a typical week would you estimate these hours to be?

#### Equipment and materials

Next, I’d like to understand what materials and equipment are needed to implement [PROGRAM]. This includes items the school already owns, new items you had to acquire for the program, and items that are donated. In describing the activities for [PROGRAM], you mentioned the following kinds of materials and equipment: [INSERT LIST OF ITEMS MENTIONED].

1. Are there any other materials that [PROGRAM] requires?

*Follow up about these materials if they are not mentioned:*

* 1. *Single-use classroom or office supplies (e.g., paper, photocopies, posters, paint, lab materials, printer ink)*
  2. *Personal or school-issued electronic devices (e.g., desktop or laptop computer, smartphone, tablet, printer, copier)*
  3. *Textbooks, workbooks, manuals or other printed materials (for teachers, students or other participants)*
  4. *Software (e.g., new purchases, upgrades)*
  5. *Internet access - wired or wireless*
  6. *In-kind donations*

##### For each item:

1. How many [ITEM]s are required?
   1. How are the [ITEM]s distributed across users? (e.g., X per student per week, X per teacher per semester, X per grade level per year)
   2. *If applicable:* How often does [ITEM] need to be replaced?
2. Is [ITEM] dedicated to [PROGRAM], or is it also used for other purposes?
   1. *If used for other purposes*: What percentage of time the item is available for use in a typical week is [ITEM] used for [PROGRAM]?

#### Other/Miscellaneous

1. Does [PROGRAM] offer any incentives, prizes, or rewards to participants or others? *If yes:*
   1. Please describe what these are and their value if you know.
   2. How many? To whom?
2. Does [PROGRAM] involve any other travel? (e.g., field trips, conferences) *If yes:*
3. Who completes this travel?
4. How often does this travel occur?
5. Does the program need any insurance or service plans for materials or equipment such as product warranties or maintenance contracts?
6. Are there any other resources that were used for [PROGRAM] that we have not discussed?

#### Additional/Follow-up Questions

*These questions could be asked during the interview, time permitting, but could also be asked via email or in a follow-up conversation if the interviewee is willing to answer future questions. They may also be easier to answer if the respondent can see the list of ingredients you are compiling. F1 and F2 may be answered from personnel schedules available from district offices.*

F1. Which personnel are 12-month contracted employees?

F2. Which personnel have contracts that are not 12 months? How long are their contracts?

F3. What are the sources of funding for [PROGRAM] as a whole? For specific ingredients?

1. In alignment with the [CAP Project Cost Analysis Standards and Guidelines](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eb0d7c7df68b75104fbc784/t/5f15293674141a78699c058d/1595222328873/CAP+Project+Cost+Analysis+Guidelines_1.0.pdf), “program” in this document refers to educational programs, interventions, activities, practices, and strategies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This protocol builds on interview protocols created by the authors and colleagues for a variety of specific cost studies and tools, including:

   Hollands, F. M., Pan, Y., Shand, R., Cheng, H., Levin, H. M., Belfield, C. R., … Hanisch-Cerda, B. (2013). [*Improving early literacy: Cost-effectiveness analysis of effective reading programs*](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583b86882e69cfc61c6c26dc/t/59076d6fe3df2803a26ea9c9/1493658992989/2013-Hollands-Improving-early-literacy1.pdf)*.* New York, NY: Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

   Virginia Department of Education. (2020). *Virginia Department of Education’s Cost-Feasibility Analysis Toolkit: Interview Protocols.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)