



## HASS Playbook: Foundations Supporting Document: Conversational Interviewing

### Overview

Conversational interviewing is a style of communication that your organization can utilize when interacting with the public to create a more naturally flowing, authentic conversation, as opposed to the traditional question-and-answer format. Conversational interviewing creates a two-way conversation structure, allowing both the organization and the individual to ask questions, build rapport, and exchange information and feedback. This process can often result in collecting higher-quality, more holistic information, allowing your organization to better support people and pets.

### Benefits of Conversational Interviewing

- Builds rapport between individuals
- Builds trust between the organization and the public
- Process starts where a person is at and empowers them to drive the conversation forward

### Conversational Interviewing Checklist

The following checklist items align with the keystones of a conversational interviewing approach and may be used by your organization to ensure consistency and commitment to this process.

- Lead conversations with [empathy](#)
- Approach with [non-judgment](#)
- Approach with [cultural sensitivity](#)
- Ask [open-ended questions](#)
- Practice [active listening](#) and [reflection techniques](#)
- Observe and be mindful of [body language](#)
- [Redirect the conversation](#) as needed

### Getting Started

1. **Prepare.** Using your **existing list of questions** you ask the public during support, matchmaking, or other conversations, brainstorm potential answers to those questions. You may consider using responses you often receive or come up with your own. Consider the directions a single topic may take so you have evolving conversation points to practice, within reason. You can always guide the conversation back to the primary purpose if it begins to move out of scope.
2. **Practice.** Conversational interviewing requires you to be flexible and comfortable with pivoting topics as appropriate. Practicing scenarios with your pre-set questions, potential

- answers, and adjacent topics that may come up can help build confidence in your ability to have conversations with the public. While preparation is important, it is impossible to prepare for all potential responses and outcomes in a conversation. Committing to flexibility and the possibility of needing to re-evaluate in real time can help reduce a potentially stressful situation. Be prepared to redirect the conversation if it gets off track.
3. **Be Present.** It is common when meeting with members of the public to write notes as specific questions are answered. In a conversational interviewing approach, you should aim to be as present as possible during the discussion. This may mean delaying certain notetaking until the end of the conversation, and reducing other potential distractions such as reducing the volume on a phone or closing a door, if available.

## Integrate Across Your Organization

Conversational interviewing techniques can enhance your shelter's operations and improve outcomes. The following checklist includes areas where these techniques can be incorporated.

- Scripts** – Although the point of conversational interviewing is to be more free-flowing and natural with your conversations, you can still follow a general script. Incorporate prompts to spark conversation and ensure your scripts use open-ended questions wherever possible.
- Staff Training** – Practice conversational interviewing with your teams! Role-playing conversations are a great way to try out different prompts and responses within the safety of your internal team and incorporate what you learn. Scripts can help with training and training can help inform script development!
- Leadership Training** – Create a culture of case management and conversational interviewing across leadership teams. Conversational interviewing principles are not only beneficial for public-facing interactions but for internal communications as well.
- Documentation** – Review your policy & procedure documentation, and update it to reflect instances where conversational interviewing is appropriate to use.
- Promote Feedback** – Empower your teams to provide feedback about how conversational interviewing is working, and equip them with a clear process for providing feedback. A working “[Lessons Learned](#)” document that staff can contribute to is a great method for gathering and reviewing feedback.

## Additional Resources

- [Case Management Training](#) - HASS
- [Adopters Welcome Manual](#) - HumanePro
- [Adoptions Training Playbook](#) - Best Friends
- [To find adopters and fosters for pets who are more difficult to place, start with your language](#) - Maddie's University